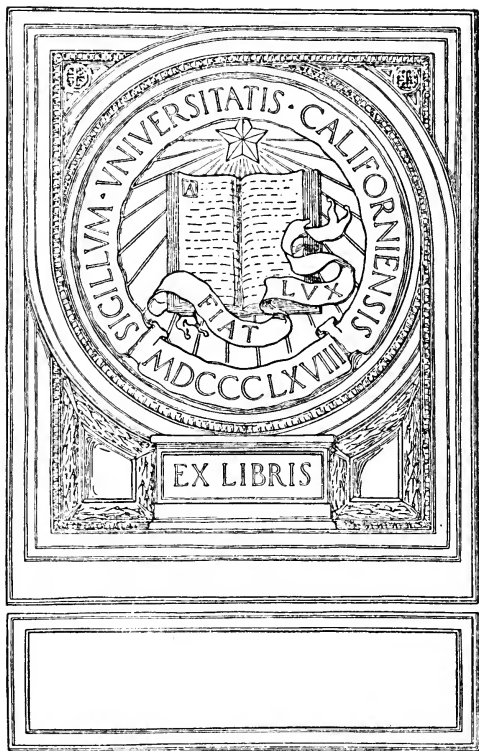


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THE SANGREAL

BY

IRWIN ST. JOHN TUCKER.



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BY

IRWIN ST. JOHN TUCKER

DEDICATED

TO

MY FELLOW CONVICTS

in the Cause of Justice and Human Freedom



PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR

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304

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THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

THE SANGREAL

A Play in Four Acts by Irwin St. John Tucker

CHARACTERS

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| KING ARTHUR | QUEEN GUENEVERE |
| LAUNCELOT | DEARWYN |
| ARCHBISHOP OF GLASTONBURY | MADELINE |
| MERLIN | ISABEL |
| PINEL, a humpbacked jester | ENID |
| HERMIT | ELFRIDA |
| GALAHAD | ETTARRE |
| GAWAINE | SISTER EVELYN |
| TRISTRAM | ABBESS and NUNS |
| PALAMEDES | |
| GARETH | |
| GERAINT | |
| KAY, the Seneschal | |
| MADOR | } Ambassadors from Ireland |
| PATRICK | |

SCENE

ACT ONE. The Garden of Queen Guenevere at Camelot. The rear is formed by the south door of the Minster, which during the act swings open disclosing the interior of the Choir, with the Archbishop's throne in view. At the right of the stage is the Castle Wall;

at the left is the Garden Wall. Left front is a bower containing a rustic throne for the Queen.

ACT TWO. Interior of the banquet hall of the Round Table.

ACT THREE. *Scene One*—A Hermit's Cell in Mid-Forest. *Scene Two*—Courtyard at Camelot, arranged for execution by fire. Judgment stand for King in Center. Stage piled with fagots at Left.

ACT FOUR. Interior of the Chapel of the Sangreal at Glastonbury.



ACT ONE.

[*Discovered: Knights and Ladies of the Court dancing upon the green. GARETH is in the middle of the circle, the other knights and ladies forming a ring around him. PINEL sits L. watching.*]

SONG OF THE DANCERS.

Come dance upon the meadow green,

Merrily, O merrily,

For we would choose our woodland queen,

Merrily, O merrily.

Then choose you east and choose you west

And choose the one that you love best,

And bid her kneel beside you there

For to be your queen so fair.

[GARETH chooses MADELINE.]

Now Heaven hath blessed and made you one,

You shall be true from sun to sun;

Salute your bride and kiss her sweet,

Then you rise upon your feet.

[MADELINE breaks away as GARETH tries to kiss her.
He pursues amid laughter and confusion. Enter KAY, R.]

KAY.

For shame! The morning of bright Pentecost
And such an uproar, in the Queen's own garden!

GERAINT.

Kay, come into the game!

KAY.

Do you not know
How it is written in the wise man's rede
That when folk's legs twitter and dance and jig
It is a prophecy of coming war?
A plague of dancing means a plague of battle.

MADELINE.

But I would rather dance than fight, Sir Kay.

GARETH.

And so would I, if 't were to fight with you.

MADELINE.

But there are men I 'd rather fight than dance with.

ISABEL.

But spare him now, while dancers are so few.

Come dance with us, Sir Kay; partners are lacking.

[*They drag him into the ring.*]

KAY. [*Struggling.*]

Children! nay, nay; my kissing days are over.

PALAMEDES.

Ha, but your knights make up for it, old scapegrace.

KAY.

Ladies! The Queen hath bid me tell you all

To come in and prepare you for the mass.

GERAINT.

Ho for the Lady Kay, the Queen's new maid-in-waiting!

[*Ladies exeunt, with laughter.*]

GARETH.

O Lord, I am aweary of this folly.

I have not had a fight for three good months.

PALAMEDES.

Why does King Arthur suffer Pentecost

To pass this year without a tournament?

KAY.

Where are the Knights to make a tournament?

Tristram, Gawaine, nor Launcelot have come home.

GERAINT.

Launcelot! It has been three years now, I think,

Since Launcelot ventured forth upon his quest.

PINEL.

Will some kind saint, with nothing else to do,

Explain to me, who am not all a fool,

What sense is in this mad sport chivalry?

GARETH.

Ha, wise Sir Fool, explain your lurking jest.

PINEL.

Sir, that is what I seek to have you do.

Here go you knights, clad all in coat of mail,
The price of six good farms upon your backs,
Roaming across the world. Somewhere you meet
Another knight, all similarly clad.

You fight; and one is taken prisoner.

And then the farmers, blacksmiths, shepherds, serfs,
Must toil like mad from dawn to early dark

To pay your ransom. What's the sense in that?

GERAINT.

The man is mad.

GARETH.

He has a joke concealed.

Out with it, fool.

PINEL.

Nay, answer me my question;

Why should they pay your ransom?

GARETH.

Well, why not?

That is the purpose why such folk were born,
And if they did not, why, with fire and sword
We'd lay their dwellings low, and slay them all.

PINEL.

Then would you lay your backs unto the plow
And hammer out, with your own lordly palms
The coats of mail so heedless thrown away?

GERAINT.

Our backs unto the plow! Insolent varlet—

[*Strikes him.*]

PALAMEDES.

Hold, hold your hand, Geraint. 'T is a merry thought.
I'd hate to eat the radishes you raised.

PINEL.

Suppose, to give your brains unwonted toil,
The serfs and smiths and tanners and such folk
Should forge no more the swords that lay them low;
Nor mail that makes you safe against their vengeance;
Nor pay the ransom that you gamble for;
What would become of all your chivalry?

GARETH.

By all the saints, this is an excellent fooling!

[*Laughs.*]

PINEL.

Is there no answer better than a laugh?

PALAMEDES.

Fool, rack your brains until the judgment day,
You 'll find no answer better than a laugh. [*Laughs.*]

GERAINT.

There is a dagger hidden in his mirth,
I feel its point, but cannot see its edge.

[*Scratches his head.*]

PINEL.

Labor no more; for time shall make all plain.

GARETH.

Where think you, sirs, our Launcelot is now?

KAY.

Friend, any wizard knowing that might have what
he would of the Queen for the telling of it. She
looks through her lattice window and sighs hours
away for Launcelot.

GARETH.

Trust him, friends. It was ever like Launcelot to
appear suddenly, when no man dreamed him near.
He may be near us now, in another dress.

KAY.

Saints bless me, lords, I had forgotten. That word
"dress"—thanks for that word, Gareth—recalls to

me that I had a message for you from the King.

[*They all rise.*]

GARETH.

Then give it, old sheep-face; do you forget the king's messages so easily?

KAY.

Oh, it was naught great. He has prepared for you all new cloaks, in which you are to hear the giving of the law.

PALAMEDES.

"Giving of the law?"

GARETH.

And what may that be?

KAY.

Why, it seems that at every Pentecost mass hereafter, the King hath ordained that there shall be read aloud in the vulgar tongue of English, the Ten Commandments of the Law.

GERAINT.

I cannot see the good of that. It is as easy to break a commandment in Latin as in English.

KAY.

But it seems that the King hath some strange idea that his knights should keep the Law that they are sworn to enforce.

GARETH.

Bah! Where then would be the good of being a knight?

PALAMEDES.

Well, let us see the cloaks. Pity that so few are here to wear them.

[*Exeunt all but KAY.*]

KAY.

Lord, but it is hot in the kitchen!—The Pentecost feast, and so few of the knights here to partake of it—

pity, pity. And the wise people talking of a great marvel that is soon to appear—mayhap upon Pentecost—well, let it come. Boy! Boy, bring me a mug of ale.—They cannot hear me. Well, I must serve myself. *[Exit, R.]*

[Enter LAUNCELOT, left, disguised as an old minstrel, with cloak, white beard, and battered harp.]

LAUNCELOT.

No one about? Then off awhile, my mask.

[Throws off cloak and beard.]

My old familiar walls of Arthur's court

Are you as glad to look on Launcelot

As he is to behold you once again?—

Here comes old Kay. Now shall I have great sport
In learning what my comrades say of me.

[He re-cloaks himself. Enter KAY, R.]

KAY.

And they say old Merlin hath been seen skulking
about these courts. Well, old Druid, best beware.
There 'll be small patience here with such as you.

LAUNCELOT. *[Whining.]*

Most noble sir, of your charity give to eat.

KAY.

Out, beggar! We have enough beggars within.

LAUNCELOT.

I could tell great news, good Sir Kay, if you would
but listen.

KAY.

Beggar, how do you know my name?

LAUNCELOT.

Lord, every man in England speaks oft of the great
Sir Kay.

KAY.

How? Do they speak of me? Here is a coin, beggar.
Do they talk of me?

LAUNCELOT.

Ah, Lord, they speak of you at every cross-roads. They say, "What news of the great Sir Kay?"

KAY.

Do they say that? Tell me more, beggar.

LAUNCELOT.

They say that Sir Kay is the handsomest knight in Arthur's court.

KAY.

Pah, that is nothing to me. I care not for that. But what else say they?

LAUNCELOT.

They say that when you fall upon a knight, there is nothing left of the knight.

KAY.

Ha, that is true. You should see me in a rage. Do they rank me with Launcelot, now, as a fighter?

LAUNCELOT.

Have you met Launcelot, sir? I had not heard so.

KAY.

Not yet. But listen, fellow, that upstart Launcelot and I shall have a reckoning. He is too much in men's mouths. I must punish him severely.

LAUNCELOT.

Good. I met him upon the road. He will be here today.

KAY.

O ye saints! Here today? Hearken, beggar, be a good friend. Tell him not what I said. I would take him by surprise. He knows not that I have enmity against him. Tell him not, beggar, else he will not come nigh the court. Promise me, scoundrel.

LAUNCELOT.

Nay, lord, I must warn him, that he suffer not unknowing.

KAY.

Promise me, villain scoundrel, before I break every bone in your body.

[KAY raises his staff, as though about to strike.

LAUNCELOT catches it and unmasks, laughing.]

KAY.

Launcelot! Lord Launcelot! O this is a merry, merry day. Come, let me clasp you in my arms!

LAUNCELOT.

What, Kay, changed so soon? Those arms are barely long enough to reach around your belt, and would you add such an extra armful as I?

KAY.

Now, lord, it was only a joke. I knew you all the time—I did, indeed.

LAUNCELOT.

Fat old liar! Help me on with this cloak again.

KAY.

But why come so tricked out, Sir Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT.

I would have sport with my old friends today.

Friend, tell me; does the Queen still speak of me?

KAY.

Well, pull the hood a little lower—so.

LAUNCELOT.

How does she look? Sad, since I went away?

Or do you think she has forgotten me?

By the splendor of God, why do you not tell me?

[Shakes KAY violently.]

KAY. [Gasps.]

Good saints have mercy! Surely she speaks not of you.

Does woman ever speak of what she thinks most?

LAUNCELOT.

Ha; well, I shall know soon. Here come the knights.
And look you!—do not tell them who I am.

[*Exit KAY, L. Enter knights, with ARCHBISHOP, R.*]

GERAINT.

Then, Bishop, you believe what these folk say?

ARCHBISHOP.

There be many strange things, lord, which are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes. It may well be that when the holy Sangreal is near, the weak ones, and those nearest to God, may know of its coming.

GARETH.

You do then believe that the holy vessel shall again be seen by mortal eyes?

ARCHBISHOP.

Sir Gareth, I pray often. And never do I pray that I ask not of God's mercy and grace to grant me to behold that golden cup, in which the blessed Joseph of Arimathea caught the blood of Christ which flowed down from the cross.

PALAMEDES.

I am a Saracen, sir, and ask for knowledge;
What is the meaning of this Sangreal?
What shall it profit him who thus beholds it?

ARCHBISHOP.

I know not all its coming may portend,
But this I hope. See, now, how wars are fought;
Some duke or baron sees some port or road
He covets for his own, by others held.
He thereupon discovers weighty reasons,—
Some secret treaty, some high moral right,—
Why all its taxes should be paid to him.
Then drums and flags and panoply of war
Call all the commoners in this holy cause

To fight and bleed and agonize and die
That he may have his field, or port, or road,
Collect the taxes of his conquered town,
And clothe his queen in splendor from the spoils,
While they who bled and fought, go home to find
Burnt homes and starving orphans all their gain;
With neither glory, gold, nor high renown,
Back from the field they go, if they survive,
To toil again beneath an iron yoke,
To pay the debt their sport of war incurred.

GARETH.

You would not have the serfs consult on war,
And common boors divide the victor's spoils?

ARCHBISHOP.

They pay the price—should they not take the prize?
Remember, lords, I am of common blood;
Christ was a workman; Peter peddled fish.
Full many a year I've watched this game of war.
With broken heart still building convent walls
To house the women widowed by the sword.

GERAINT.

But this is the reason why such folk were born,
To toil and sweat in peace, and bleed in war,
That gentlefolk spend their lives in chivalry.
If common people heard such words as yours,
There'd be an end of kings; and no more war;
Then where would all our knightly glory be?
'T is well such words are said not in the open,
'T would be rebellion!

GARETH.

Speak you against the king?

ARCHBISHOP.

Gaze on this cross, which all of us revere.
Was not that Christ of whom this is the sign

Nailed to the cross for speaking 'gainst his king?
Was Christ a traitor?

GARETH.

Not so; for he was God.

But those days are all gone; you are not Christ.

ARCHBISHOP.

God's church hath seen full many a kingdom born,
And seen as many die. What's kings to us
Who wear a crucifix?

PALAMEDES.

But still, my lord,

But still you speak not of the Sangreal.

ARCHBISHOP.

True; then, while wars are waged for sordid aims,
Taxes and trade for motive, dust for end,
Yet I do see such splendor of clean youth
Tricked and betrayed to bloody sacrifice
Because they listen to beguiling words
That clothe a wretched, shabby trader's lie
Into a cause as holy as the Cross.—
My lords, I am aweary of this fraud!
If blood must still the world's wide fields bedew,
Then let it be for no less worthy cause
Than that for which Christ died upon the tree,
To loose the captive's chains, break tyrants' power,
And bring on earth God's kingdom as in heaven!

GARETH.

I never heard this meaning said before.

PALAMEDES.

Oft have I thought it, but in heathen terms.

ARCHBISHOP.

This is the meaning of the holy vision.
Blood has been shed in crooked traders' wars
Full long enough. Let come the Sangreal
And never knight shall lift his glittering spear

But to redress injustice, shatter wrong,
And give God's poor protection in the right.
Yea, then God's knights that ride forth seeking glory
Would not behold their manhood sold and stricken
To gild the purse of some pot-bellied knave
That strips his wife and children of their living
The while he scours the earth for glory's sake.
Ah, could our knights behold the Sangreal!

PALAMEDES.

But this have I believed since I was man.
Is this to be a Christian? If I am worthy,
I pray you, sir, baptize me!

GERAINT.

But this is treason!
You speak against the king!

ARCHBISHOP.

How speak I so?

GARETH.

You would stir up the people to rebel.
The king thinks no such thoughts. This smacks of
treason!

ARCHBISHOP.

Sir, you are young. Take counsel of gray hairs.
Let not this charge of "Treason" lightly fly,
Lest, if the king change overnight his mind
You shall be found the traitor on the morrow.

PALAMEDES.

If Christian knights so lightly hold their faith
In terror of a kingly government,
I'm pagan still. I'd not be such a Christian.

ARCHBISHOP.

Now see, Sir Gareth, what your words have done.

GARETH.

But if you had your will, there'd be no war.

ARCHBISHOP.

Nay, there might still be war; but it would be
Embattled poor against the might of tyrants,
Such as the Sangreal might lead and bless.
But I must leave you now. God keep you, sirs.

[*Exit, R.*]

GERAINT.

'Tis well such words are said but by a priest.

PALAMEDES.

But how long since the holy vessel vanished?

GARETH.

'Tis forty years, I have heard wise men say.

PALAMEDES.

And shall it come again, this Pentecost?

'Tis pity that so few are here to see it.

[*Enter KAY, R.*]

KAY.

News, brethren. Sir Tristram comes, and Sir Gawaine will be here shortly.

[*Enter TRISTRAM. They welcome him tumultuously.*]

GERAINT.

Welcome, Tristram, flower of chivalry.

GARETH.

Greeting to the knight of Lyonesse.

PALAMEDES.

Welcome, friend Tristram. Where was it we met last?

TRISTRAM.

By the mass, friends, this feels truly like coming home.

PALAMEDES.

Where I am is your home, old Tristram, so long as I have bite or rag left.

TRISTRAM.

Why, if it is not my old war-dog of the East, Palamedes. Good fare, comrade!

GERAINT.

What adventures, Sir Tristram? Have you met with Launcelot?

TRISTRAM. [*Laughs.*]

Well have I met Launcelot, and indeed it is no fault of his that I am here. We met in a valley in Cornwall, and neither knew the other. He was roasting a joint of sheep in the shoulder-plate of his armor over the fire beside a little spring. I rode up and demanded the meat from him. So we fought and had almost slain each other, when I smote him upon the bare shoulder; and he swore his old oath, "By the splendor of God!" And I knew him through his helmet, and we would fight no more.

GARETH.

I wonder if he will be here for the quest of the Sangreal?

TRISTRAM.

What mean you? The Sangreal?

GERAINT.

The wise ones have prophesied that the Sangreal shall shortly appear.

TRISTRAM.

The saints be thanked, I am in time for it. And truly Launcelot should be here to behold it, if it should chance that the sacred vessel shall visit these courts.

[*Enter R., MADELINE, ISABEL, DEARWYN. MADELINE and DEARWYN stop to talk with LAUNCELOT, giving him a coin. ISABEL joins the knights.*]

GARETH.

What has the Sangreal to do with Launcelot?

TRISTRAM.

Nay, surely, you know that? In the old days, it was templed in the shrine at Glastonbury. But King

Pelles, who was chief over its guardians, loved one of the maiden pilgrims who came to kneel before it. So the sacred vessel vanished from the sight of men, and the spear with which the Lord's side was pierced fell upon that sinful knight, and wounded him.

ISABEL.

What of the pilgrim, then?

TRISTRAM.

She bore to the sinful knight a daughter, whom they named Elaine of the Sangreal, for to mind that because of her begetting the Sangreal vanished from among men. And before ever Launcelot came to this place, he met and loved Elaine of the Sangreal. She died, and Launcelot wandered to this court, seeking to forget his sorrow. She left a son, whom they called Galahad. To tell you a secret, he will be here today, seeking for knighthood. He is a goodly youth.

GERAINT.

How soon was she forgotten, in new love.

ISABEL.

Peace, Sir Geraint. Let there not be among us More gossip of the Queen this day, I pray you.

GARETH.

But was not that Elaine, the daughter of old King Pellenore of Astolat, who slew herself for love of Launcelot?

TRISTRAM.

That was another maid of the same name.

ISABEL.

Truly, what magic is there in "Elaine"
That should twice snare the feet of Launcelot?

TRISTRAM.

Because she slew herself, her youngest brother
Went mad; another, Torre, hath turned a hermit

And dwells in far mid-forest for her penance;
And all because our Launcelot would love
One woman at a time.

[*Enter GAWAINE, Right.*]

ISABEL.

At least, then, he was faithful to the Queen
Since first he met the Queen.

PALAMEDES.

Ho ho! So none may gossip of the Queen?

GAWAINE.

Greeting, my lords. What say you of the Queen?

GARETH.

Why, welcome home, Gawaine!

[*DEARWYN runs to meet him. He kisses her hand, but still looks at the knights.*]

GAWAINE.

The Queen, sirs, is my aunt. Do you remember,
I pray you, that her name must be held sacred.

TRISTRAM.

Take no offence, Gawaine. We were but saying
How eagerly the court looks for Sir Launcelot.

GAWAINE.

Not all the court is burning for Sir Launcelot.

[*He turns and walks with DEARWYN across to MADELINE and ISABEL.*]

TRISTRAM.

What ails Gawaine?

ISABEL.

I marvel if he is jealous?

[*Enter R., LYNNETTE, ELFRIDA, ETTARRE, ENID, who move about conversing. The knights join them.*]

GAWAINE.

Greeting, Lady Madeline. It is joy to see your face
again.

MADELINE.

Why, welcome home, my lord. I would there were more of you.

DEARWYN.

Where have you been, Gawaine? Have you been wounded,
Sick, or in prison? Tell me your adventures.
It has been weary years since I have seen you.

GAWAINE.

Lady, did you receive my messages?

DEARWYN.

You sent me home three knights whom you had van-
quished,
Yes, truly; but those knights were not yourself.

MADELINE.

But did you meet Sir Launcelot in your wanderings?

GAWAINE.

Lady, I am full weary of that name.
At every cross-roads inn, the length of Britain,
They asked me of Sir Launcelot. Pardon me.

DEARWYN.

But why should you be wroth with that brave knight?
I was about to ask of him myself.

GAWAINE.

Then here is one who will not speak of him.
[*He talks to LAUNCELOT. DEARWYN weeps to MADE-*
LINE. *Enter KAY, R.*]

KAY.

The Queen comes!

[*Enter QUEEN GUENEVERE, attended by PAUL, her page.*]

GUENEVERE.

Ah, Tristram, glad, most glad, am I to see you.
Welcome, nephew Gawaine. I am most glad

Dearwyn, my sweet, to see you made so happy.

[*She takes her seat upon her rustic throne.*]

Sir Tristram, tell, I pray; what news have you?

TRISTRAM.

I was but now telling your ladies, Madame,

That I had almost slain Sir Launcelot

And he slain me, when once we met in Cornwall...

GAWAINE.

Sir Tristram, I beseech you of your mercy

Mention some other name.

TRISTRAM.

What mean you, sir?

GAWAINE.

I am full weary of the sound of "Launcelot."

God's blood, where'er I go, by land or sea,

This Launcelot hath been there; and not a word

Can any maiden, churl, innkeeper, hermit,

Knight, nobleman or beggar, say to me,

But "Oh! Sir Launcelot! Ah, that wondrous man!

And do you know him well?"

GUENEVERE.

Gawaine, have done.

GAWAINE.

Pardon me, madame. I would not offend you,

But this name is too much in all men's mouths.

TRISTRAM.

Gawaine, this is the court of good King Arthur,

And there shall be no brawling in its bounds.

GAWAINE.

Why say you this? I am not brawling, lord,

But I should be most glad, if cause were given,

To show that there are other knights in Britain

Beside this Launcelot.

GUENEVERE. [*Stamps her foot.*]

Gawaine, how do you dare?

TRISTRAM.

Put up that sword.

GAWAINE.

Do you, Tristram, take shelter from my sword
Behind a woman's skirts?

TRISTRAM. [*Draws sword.*]

Ha, by St. Paul!

[*They engage. Screams from the ladies. LAUNCELOT
pulls back TRISTRAM and steps between them.*]

LAUNCELOT.

Hold, gentlemen. I pray you do not quarrel.

GAWAINE.

So Tristram hides behind an old man now!

LAUNCELOT.

He has a sure defense.

[*Plucks sword from beneath his robe.*]

GAWAINE.

So, would you dare!

[*They engage. GAWAINE is disarmed, LAUNCELOT
twisting his sword out of his hand.*]

GARETH.

Bravo, old man! Where did you learn that trick?

[*GAWAINE wrathfully picks up his sword and walks
to other side of stage, DEARWYN comforting him.*]

TRISTRAM.

What is your price for lessons with the sword?

[*Smites LAUNCELOT heavily on the shoulder. LAUNCELOT
winces and rubs his shoulder.*]

LAUNCELOT.

By the splendor of God!

TRISTRAM.

Aha! 'Tis Launcelot!

[*LAUNCELOT unhoods, laughing. The court cheers.*]

OMNES.

Launcelot! Launcelot! Launcelot!

[LAUNCELOT *turns to the QUEEN and, kneeling, kisses her hand.*]

GUENEVERE.

My knight, my knight, you have returned to me.

LAUNCELOT.

Good Sir Gawaine, stand not apart, I pray.

Somewhat you have against me, that I grant;

But on this feast day, let's be friends again.

[GAWAINE *turns sullenly away from him.*]

Ho, was the joke too keen?

[*Cathedral bell rings. Procession of acolytes, monks, etc., crosses stage, rear, Left to Right, chanting; ARCHBISHOP brings up the rear. All drop to knee as he passes. Just before him walk GAHERIS, UWAIN and GALAHAD, all clad in white.*]

PALAMEDES.

It is a goodly sight. Who are those three

That walk in white, before his grace the bishop?

ISABEL.

They are the candidates for knighthood, sir.

They shall be knighted later, at the feast.

[*Knights and ladies stream after the ARCHBISHOP into church, Right. GUENEVERE makes as if to follow them, then returns to LAUNCELOT; placing PAUL on guard at rear of stage. They embrace.*]

[*House goes dark for thirty seconds. During this time the south doors swing open, disclosing the interior of the church. The procession passes up the main aisle of the cathedral into the chancel, chanting as they go the Pentecost introit, Exsurgat Deus. As the Gloria is reached, the lights in front come on again, and the voice of the ARCHBISHOP is heard, chanting.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto;

CHOIR.

*Sicut erat in principio, et nunc et semper,
Per omnia saecula saeculorum, Amen.*

GUENEVERE.

My knight, my knight, my knight! Hast thought of
me?

LAUNCELOT.

Lady, what chains could keep my thoughts away?

GUENEVERE.

For three long years my eyes have sought for you,
And found you not.

LAUNCELOT.

But my heart called across the parting gulf.
Could yours not hear its cry?

GUENEVERE.

Ah, but what good a cry, to one who thirsts?
Yea, venturing to the world's extremities
An empty desert have you left at home.
The heart of Britain beat in poverty
While you have blessed Antipodes with your spear.
And ever came messengers to tell of you—
Now here you were, now half across the world—

LAUNCELOT.

And there I spread the name of Guenevere—

GUENEVERE.

O but, my knight, what worth is fame to me
With you not near to share it? Know you not
No woman cares for fame, or wealth, or jewels,
Except to make herself more lovely in
Her true love's eyes—or to make her forget?

LAUNCELOT.

You could not be more lovely in my eyes.

[*Chanting begins again within, forming a barely audible accompaniment to their talk.*]

GUENEVERE.

And all the weight of fame you crowned me with

Made me more hungry for your eyes to see.

Nor knew I never where, or how you were,

What kingdoms winning, or by what princess won—

LAUNCELOT.

Rich lands, proud marvellous kingdoms have I seen,

But never one where I desired to rule,

Since I was crowned king of a lovelier realm—

The heart of Guenevere.

GUENEVERE.

You could have been a king?

LAUNCELOT.

I am a king.

My father ruled the lands of Brittany,

Whose throne was foully seized by Claudias.

I could have driven him out, and crowned myself,

And been a king, even as your Arthur is,

Save that I could not then be Guenevere's knight;

And so I cast away a crown, for you,

And gained most wondrous richly by the exchange.

ARCHBISHOP.

Dominus vobiscum.

CHOIR.

Et cum spiritu tuo.

ARCHBISHOP.

Oremus.

GUENEVERE.

In those three years, through all those wondrous lands,

How many wondrous maidens have you seen—

LAUNCELOT.

Not one, that could compare with Guenevere—

GUENEVERE.

Nay, but the loveliest of all lands on earth.
Sun-haired are Saxon damsels; midnight-eyed,
With rosy luscious lips, are they of France;
Yea, Launcelot, your own land oft laughed to see
The heart of Britain bleeding in your helm;
Winsome the maids of Ireland, and as shy
As their own mists the girls of Scotland are,
Who with their sweet evasion make the heart
More keen to clasp them close—oh, how know I
That Launcelot hath been true?

LAUNCELOT.

My loveliest one!

GUENEVERE.

And there's not one, but for his name alone
Would count dishonor glory, in his arms.

LAUNCELOT.

How came this seed suspicion in your mind?

[PINEL enters R. and attempts to pass through courtyard. PAUL sets fiercely upon him with his dagger, and drives him back.]

PAUL. [*Fiercely.*]

Out, twisted fool! Back, lest I strike you dead!

[*Exit PINEL.*]

GUENEVERE.

From what sweet midnight treasons have you come?

LAUNCELOT.

Treasons! Lady, how comes this word from you?
I have most often found they who are traitors
First raise the cry to hide their own misdeed!

GUENEVERE.

O Launcelot, O do not so misjudge me!
You have been gone in glorious chivalry,

While I was caged up here, and ate my heart out
In longing, and in loving, and in fear.

LAUNCELOT.

In long lone nights beside the starlit road
When, pillowed on my saddle, awake I lay
While keen winds swept the firmament above,
I pondered much upon this love of ours.
In each man's deepest soul some fire is sowed
Whose upward burning drives him ever on
Against all ills unto his heart's desire.
Whatever goal, or by whatever power
Such hearts may seek and win their dwelling-place
—So it be power, fame, wisdom, justice, wealth—
It is not there that he shall find content.
Both strife and prize to him are incomplete.
That surging spirit which turns a shattered cause
And hurls resistless on to victory;
Or that calm, sure, and unperturbed mind
Which, ordering wasteful remnants to its will,
With weak, unstable midges for its stone
Builds to eternity—whatever height
Warrior or builder wins, 't is lonely there.
Man in man's self no comfort finds, nor praise.
But to achieve His will God to each man
Hath summed up every lacking quality,
All beauty, sweetness, wonder, grace, and truth,
And made of them—a woman. And every heart
Seeking its own, upon one woman rests,
As doth the sailor, through wild stormy seas
Guide by one star. And this you are to me.
As easy might the soul of Launcelot
Destroy itself, as on another fix,
Forgetting Guenevere.

GUENEVERE.

Forgive me, Launcelot.

[*They embrace.*]ARCHBISHOP. [*Within, chanting.*]

God spake these words, and said
Thou shalt have none other gods but me.

CHOIR.

Kyrie eleison.

GUENEVERE.

Ah, did you hear? God never gave that law
To any woman's heart. Oh, I have bowed
Before the incarnate wonder of the host,
And to the God therein concealed and hid
I tried to pray. But ever would my heart
Rebel against the false acknowledgment
And worshiped—you!

ARCHBISHOP.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in
vain.

LAUNCELOT.

Sweet pagan! With a kiss
Such blasphemy be hushed.

GUENEVERE.

Now have you given
My lips new cause for their idolatry.

LAUNCELOT.

Why does he speak in English, and not Latin?
This is a fashion novel to my ears.

GUENEVERE.

'Tis Arthur's will, that knights may know the law.
This is the day when from the flaming Mount
The Law was given to Moses; and the day
When flaming tongues of fire on twelve apostles
Came down from heaven; so Arthur has ordained
That on this day henceforth the Law be read,

That all his errant knights may be instructed
And know the law that they are sworn enforce.
It comes now with the triple weight and power
Of King, and Church, and God. Hear and obey.

[*She stands with upraised hand pointing toward the church door.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

GUENEVERE. [*Hands to her ears.*]

Not that, not that! O God, that awful word!

LAUNCELOT.

What difference shall a word make to our love?

GUENEVERE.

But that "word" is God's law.

LAUNCELOT.

How can it be?

If God is love, then our love came from God,
And cannot then be evil; for how shall he
Condemn his own?

GUENEVERE.

Not—not adultery!

I never thought it so! O God, have mercy,
I thought but of myself, my happiness,
My right to live—to love; I never thought
That womanhood is more than Guenevere.
I am another man's; this love is evil;
And we are both condemned.

LAUNCELOT. [*Passionately.*]

What shall we care?

There is no heaven outside of these your arms,
There is no hell, if you be there with me.
What joy could you or I in Paradise find
Alone? Or wandering ever desolate
In solitary pain through empty heaven?

GUENEVERE.

O, that is true! What if in deepest hell
We both were plunged, where ever-burning fire
In torment locks the hopeless screaming souls,
Those fiery scorching surges would but drive
Me closer to the shelter of your love.

LAUNCELOT.

And in the sacred circle of our arms
No pain could pierce, but to be soothed away
By one kiss—such as this. [*Kisses her.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

LAUNCELOT. [*Starts away.*]

God! That was said to me! My neighbor's wife!
And if my neighbor were my friend, my king,
Should it not make damnation triply sure?

GUENEVERE.

O Launcelot, have you turned so quickly from me?
You have but said that were no pain, with me!

LAUNCELOT.

But if that hell doth rage within myself,
And if myself my own damnation be,
Then how should I escape?

GUENEVERE.

What are you saying?

You do believe in heaven and in hell?

LAUNCELOT.

I do believe—in hell. Look you, my queen,
We are both false to Arthur. He loves me well,
And loves you only, only among women.

GUENEVERE.

It is not true. He has another love.

LAUNCELOT.

What say you? Arthur has another love?
Here's news indeed. Who is his paramour?

GUENEVERE.

His love is—Britain.

Her only doth he worship, and to her
Bends his whole soul in service. Why, for me
This saintly king cares nothing. I have given him
No son to be his heir. He does not love me.
Half-love is no love. Where I give my heart
Love must be mine alone.

LAUNCELOT.

Sweet, such is mine.

GUENEVERE.

I would I could believe.

LAUNCELOT.

How can you doubt?

GUENEVERE.

Answer me truly, Launcelot. Look on me.
This crown, these robes, this title of a queen
They are not mine. All, all were given to me.—
Oh, if I were a man, I could go forth
And win myself a kingdom! But, being a woman,
I am what I am made.

LAUNCELOT.

A man! Ah, sweet,

Rob not the world of sweetness, for the sake
Of poor ambition.

GUENEVERE.

But my hands, my feet,
My eyes, my very thoughts, were fixed and ordered.
I might not say, nor do, nor think, nor look
Unseemly to a queen. But when you came—
Ah, there was magic freedom from those chains.
I cannot share your heart. Love, swear to me
There is no other!

LAUNCELOT.

On the crucifix—

GUENEVERE.

And that there never was!

LAUNCELOT.

I swear it, lady!

[*They embrace.*]

PAUL.

Madame, Sir Launcelot, hist! They come from church.

LAUNCELOT.

So soon? It cannot be.

[*They stand concealed while knights and ladies stream out of church door and into castle. ISABEL sees them and comes to them.*]

ISABEL.

Why came you not to church?

GUENEVERE.

Cannot I worship

Beneath God's temple of the open sky?

ISABEL.

But were you worshipping God?—An ill-done thing;
The priests will count it for a mortal sin,
To stay away from mass at Pentecost.

GUENEVERE.

I shall be well content to do their penance

For such another sin. Sweet, be content;

I'll answer for my faults.

[*Exit ISABEL.*][*Enter KAY.*]

KAY.

The King requires your presence, Sir Launcelot.

LAUNCELOT.

I go. Farewell, my lady.

GUENEVERE.

How seemed the King towards my absence, Kay?

KAY.

Ill-pleased at first, my lady. But when he heard
How Launcelot came even as the great bell rang

He laughed and said it was no wonder, then
 You had forgot the mass, for so would he
 In joy of having Launcelot back again.

GUENEVERE.

Who were those youths in white in the procession?

KAY.

They are the candidates for knighthood, lady.
 I have their names upon a parchment here. *[Exit.]*

GUENEVERE. *[Reads.]*

*"Gaheris, son of King Uriens of North Wales;
 Uwaine, son of Sir Lamorak of Armorica; Galahad,
 son of—God in heaven, what says this?—Galahad,
 son of Sir Launcelot of the Lake and Elaine, Princess
 of the Sangreal"—*

It lies, it lies! So be its lying undone!

[Tears parchment.]

Launcelot is true to me.—But was he lying?
 Galahad—his son—his son! Ha, has he made me
 Sport of the loose-tongued tattlers all these years
 While he upon his lone adventuring slips
 Back to his paramours?
 O all you saints who once were women too
 Give me revenge upon him!

[Enter LAUNCELOT, R.]

LAUNCELOT.

Madame, the King doth bid you to the feast.

GUENEVERE.

False traitor knight, how dare you speak to me?

LAUNCELOT. *[In amazement.]*

Madame! My lady!

GUENEVERE.

Look you, be not so hardy as to abide
 Here in my court one moment more. Go! Go!

LAUNCELOT.

By the splendor of God, what means this, Guenevere?

GUENEVERE.

I have betrayed my lord, the truest husband
That ever woman had, for such a traitor.

LAUNCELOT.

Nay, Madame, no man yet, nor woman neither
Has ever called me traitor.

GUENEVERE.

Go, I say.

LAUNCELOT

I will not go until you give me cause.

[*Grasps her arm.*]

GUENEVERE.

Touch me not, you! [*Strikes him across the face.*]

[*PAUL runs to her side. Enter KAY, R.*]

KAY.

The King awaits; the banquet is prepared.

[*LAUNCELOT and KAY exeunt, R.*]

GUENEVERE.

Launcelot is false. God, now let heaven fall!

[*Curtain.*]

ACT TWO.

[*Interior of Banquet-Hall of the Round Table. KAY and PINEL discovered, KAY putting the table to rights.*]

PINEL.

Now shall we listen to the craven boasting
Of every knight who, mighty with his tongue,
Tells as God's truth the deeds he would have done
If he had thought of them when time was ripe.

KAY.

Well, and why not? No witnesses are here
That may disprove the wildest lie from hell.

PINEL.

They call me fool because I tell the truth,
They split their sides with laughter if by chance
I utter one wise word. Indeed, Sir Kay,
Truth is wild folly in a world of lies.

KAY.

Then be a fool, and pass for Socrates.
What care you? You are fed.

PINEL.

Fed? Yes, on curses,
On kicks and blows and vinegar and crusts,
That make a dog of one who struggles vainly
To hold his reason in a world gone mad.

Now here is Launcelot, noblest knight of men,
 Robbing the King of honor and of love,
 Beneath the cloak of glorious chivalry;
 While if a woman of the common sort
 Being a wife, became another man's,
 The queen herself would sentence her to death.

KAY.

Dog of a hunchback, let not your hoarse growl
 Echo against the queen!

PINEL.

Is she a woman?

KAY.

She is the queen! [Exit, L.]

PINEL.

But answer me the question;
 What function hath she other than a woman?
 [Enter LAUNCELOT, L., and GAWAINE, R. They cross
in center.]

GAWAINE.

Will you fight me, Sir Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT. *[Absently.]*

Not I. [Exit, R.]

GAWAINE. *[Furiously.]*

He even scorns to cross his swords with me.

[Enter GUENEVERE, L.]

GAWAINE.

Madame, it is most shameful! You display
 Your love for this man Launcelot brazenly.
 What, on a public feast-day, stay from mass
 To kiss him, in the garden, in broad day?

GUENEVERE.

Gawaine! How dare you speak so—to my face?

GAWAINE.

It has been said too long behind your back.
 When I come home, after my two year's quest,

I find the court linking, with jests and laughter,
Your name with Launcelot's; and the King himself
The only man in all the breadth of England
Who does not know this joke beneath his nose.

GUENEVERE.

Gawaine, think what you say!

GAWAINE.

Think what you do!

Is there no honor left?—My most dear aunt,
I am half crazy with this fearful thing.
I am the King's next nephew, and shall be
Ruler in Arthur's stead, if he should die;
I cannot stand and see the crown of Britain
So dragged in the mire of this foul fancy—

GUENEVERE.

You wrong me twice, Gawaine; he does not love me,
And I do not love Launcelot.

GAWAINE.

Name of God,

How can you say that, Madame?

GUENEVERE.

It is true.

He has insulted me, and played me false,
So brutishly— O, if I were a man,
I'd get revenge!

GAWAINE.

Why, what low cur is this?

He stole your love, and lured you to dishonor,
And played you false?—This hour then he shall die!

GUENEVERE.

Where do you go?

GAWAINE.

To run him through the body for a hound.

GUENEVERE.

How did you fare this morning at his sword?

GAWAINE.

Then I shall die defending England's honor.
Let go!

GUENEVERE.

Stay here. I have a better plan.
Here at the feast, before the Table Round,
Do you bring scorn on him in open court.

GAWAINE.

Scorn Launcelot! How? Could such a thing be done!

GUENEVERE.

Tell that old story of his shameful ride
When in a muckcart, down the hangman's way,
He rode unarmored to the castle gates.

GAWAINE.

But that was to save you from shame and peril!

GUENEVERE.

No matter—tell! Nay, come with me, Gawaine.

[Exeunt, R.]

*[MERLIN comes from corner, L., where he has been
hiding.]*

MERLIN.

What, son Pinel? Have you forgot Merlin?

PINEL.

Away, away! What fearful dream brings you!

MERLIN.

Nay, boy, why tremble so? I would not harm you.

PINEL.

Not harm me—you! Before my waking eyes,
Fixed with gray terror in the chill midnight,
I see your figure with uplifted knife
Beside the bloody stone of sacrifice,
Your hand stretched forth to slay me for the last
Of that poor line of victims to your gods.

MERLIN.

The gods desired you not, deformed and twisted;
And therefore you were spared.

PINEL.

Nay, I was saved
By yon wild knight that drove you to your hole.
But still the fearful power in those wild eyes
Turns me to ice within. Away! Away!

MERLIN.

Come, son Pinel. I brought you here a gift,
To do with as you will; a little vial
Filled with strong poison, slaying instantly.
Do with it as you will. I give no order;
Yet I have heard that you are treated ill.
This will bring sure release. [Retires.]

PINEL.

Shall it be so?
Black, black as serpents' eyes, glittering with hate.
I'll drop it in my food, and so be rid
Of all my foes together.

[He retires brooding on poison.]

[Enter GAWAINE, R.]

GAWAINE.

Launcelot, this treachery shall cost you dear.

[Enter KAY, L.]

KAY.

O ho, Gawaine, I cannot stop my laughing.
'T was I that put it in Sir Launcelot's ear
To mask and hood, and so deceive the court.
And O ye saints, 't was a good joke on you!

GAWAINE. *[Draws sword.]*

It is not safe, Sir Kay, to joke with me.

KAY.

O gods! O saints! Put up that sword, Gawaine.
I meant no harm. I'll swear it was not I.

GAWAINE.

If it were not beneath my knightly oath
To soil this sword with blood of such as you,
I'd teach you such keen humor as would cure
Your soul of mirth forever. Up, vile hound!

[Kicks him. *Exit, R.*]

KAY. [To PINEL.]

Ha, you Pinel. So you would laugh at me?
I'll have you beaten bloody for that laugh.

PINEL.

I laugh, my lord? But wherefore should I laugh?

KAY.

I heard you laugh. Will you cross words with me?
[Lifts staff to strike him.]

I'll teach you better manners, twisted fool!

[PINEL suddenly draws knife and threatens KAY.]

What, will you draw on me? Will you threaten me?
I'll have you drawn and quartered but for this.

[Exit hurriedly.]

PINEL.

He has beat me the last time. Curses and kicks
Have been my portion from my twisted birth.
Good poison, you should have been my friend
To help me from this cave of starving filth,
Be with me now, and we shall get revenge
On this fat bastard of a seneschal.

[He takes an apple from the table, cuts a slit in it
with his knife, and pours in the poison. KAY re-
enters.]

PINEL.

Humbly, Sir Kay, I do entreat your pardon.
It was a moment's madness drove me wild—
The thought of what I am, and what must be.
I bring this apple as peace-offering.
Will you not eat, in token of forgiveness?

KAY.

You're a good knave, Pinel. We'll let it pass.
But—always be mindful of the dignities,
And laugh not at superiors in distress.

PINEL.

I'll do so, lord.—Will you not eat the apple?

KAY.

'T will spoil my dinner; but, to give you ease—
[*He is about to bite the apple when a gong rings, R.*]
Ah ha, they call me for the marshalling.
Stand to your place, Pinel. I'll soon be back.
[*KAY places the apple on dish at the Queen's place,
and exit. As soon as he is gone PINEL dashes to the
table and is about to take the apple when the ARCH-
BISHOP enters, Left.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

What, son Pinel? Take not the king's own silver.

PINEL.

I was not, lord—

ARCHBISHOP.

Back to your place, Pinel.

[*PINEL slinks to corner. MERLIN comes forth.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

Merlin! You here! What deviltry is afoot?

MERLIN.

The old gods wake, demanding sacrifice,
And to prepare the victims I have come.

ARCHBISHOP.

What heathen hole have you profaned till now?
Five years ago, with all your Druid pack,
You were forbid to linger in these courts.
Be gone before the King shall catch you here.

MERLIN.

You are the chancellor; a post I held
When ancient gods held sway in Camelot.

But on this ancient feast of Pentecost
No stranger may be driven from these gates,
And Camelot's self today is sanctuary.

ARCHBISHOP.

What, would ye use a Christian festival
To bring again your bloody demons here?

MERLIN.

The Feast of Flame was old, ere Christ was born.
This was our festival, before you stole it.

ARCHBISHOP.

See that no deviltry is wrought today,
And that you quit these gates ere midnight come.

MERLIN.

The law is yours. The people's hearts are mine.
Yea, in the caves and dens where I am driven
I know, I know; my nostrils snuff the wind.
The ancient gods of Britain waken now
Beneath the spell your Cross hath cast upon them.
The smell of sacrifice is in the air.
The old gods waken!

ARCHBISHOP.

What conspiracy

Have your dark tribesmen framed with overseas?
Ha, is it you that move behind these threats
The Norsemen make of ravaging these isles?

MERLIN.

I tell you that men's hearts are pagan still
Beneath the gloss and pageantry of Christ.
Think you these laws that Arthur bids enforce
Upon his bold knight-errantry—these rules
Of high self-sacrifice, of spotless honor—
Think you that they sit light upon men's souls
Bred to stern Odin's law, to Thor's red power,
And to those older, sterner gods than they
Whereof we Druids know?

ARCHBISHOP.

There strike you home;
The knights are restless.

MERLIN.

Hearken, chancellor.
Your saint of Glastonbury brought his rood,
His spear, his chalice, from Jerusalem.
The Druids came from Egypt; and our shrines,
Our dolmens, and our cromlechs, and our pyres
Cover Mid-Europe, from the Spanish strait
Even to the misty shore where Ireland looks
Past unknown waters to the sinking sun.
Long centuries before your Christ was born
Our mysteries were held; the fragrant blood
Of shrieking victims stained the altar-stones
From Hebrides to Gaul; and think you so
That your weak Gospel could uproot our strength,
Planted so deep; or terrify our gods
With your strange Gospel of a dying Christ?
Yea, we shall see; there's death upon the air.
The old gods waken, and their thirst demands
After so long—a royal sacrifice!

ARCHBISHOP. [*Starts.*]
You mean the King?

MERLIN.

Behold what you shall see.
All nations, weary of the spell of Christ,
Prepare their sons, their strongest and their best,
For bloody sacrifice, in demon frenzy
Upon the altar of our ancient gods.
Behold what you shall see. [*He points to the apple.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

Old ravens hoarsely croak, presaging rain,
For envy of fair weather. Get you hence
Ere midnight comes, or never stir hence more.

MERLIN.

Midnight is time enough.

ARCHBISHOP.

You shall be watched.

MERLIN.

Midnight is time enough.

[*Pretends to go out, then hides.*]

[*Enter KING ARTHUR, carrying a weeping child.*]

ARTHUR.

There, cry no more; dry up those creeping tears.

Why, there's a bad cat, that would scratch a baby.

Yea, we must have it punished for bad manners.

What, weeping still?—Then shall we have an apple?

Now let this rosy fruit comfort your pain—

[*ARTHUR stretches out his hand to the poisoned apple.*]

PINEL *springs forward in horror.*]

PINEL.

No, no, my lord, King Arthur. Touch it not!

ARTHUR.

What, boy Pinel? Can I not have an apple?

PINEL.

The baby, sir. She is my sister's child.

ARTHUR.

That's not her fault. Why should she starve for that?

All ladies must be fed. Here, little one,

With your bad uncle and your scratching cat

You are in evil case. Take this big apple.

Now run and tell your mother you are happy.

[*He takes an apple from another place and gives it to her. Child curtsies and runs off.*]

Pinel, too often you forget your manners.

PINEL.

Pardon, my lord. I was—it was—a madness.

ARCHBISHOP.

I did not know, sir, you loved children so.

ARTHUR.

Ha, are you there, my conscience? Wherefore hid?
Nor no one else knows it except the children.
There is a longing in my inmost heart
For children of my own, that burns like fire.
I do not tell, lest Guenevere should think
That I reproach her for her barrenness;
And I love her, I think, yet more than children.
How stands the knights' assembly?

ARCHBISHOP.

Slender, yet;
But more come in with every hour that passes.

ARTHUR.

Yea, I have heard how Launcelot appeared
In mask, and thus discomfited Gawaine.
Well, let us on and join our company. [*Exeunt, R.*]
[PINEL again darts to table and seeks to take the
poisoned apple. Enter KAY, R.]

KAY.

What, what, again! Caught stealing! Back, Pinel,
The company is coming to the feast.

PINEL.

Ah, God, too late, too late. I'll watch my chance.
The curse of Merlin works.

KAY.

Back to your place.

[*Trumpet sounds. Enter the procession of knights
and ladies, headed by KING ARTHUR and QUEEN
GUENEVERE. They take places around the Table,
KING ARTHUR, the QUEEN and ARCHBISHOP sitting
at the high table beneath canopy.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

Oculi omnium in te sperant, Domine,

OMNES.

Et tu das escam illorum in tempore opportuno.

ARCHBISHOP.

*Benedic, Domine, illa dona tua et nos pueros tuos,
per Jesus Christum nostrum Dominum.*

OMNES.

Amen.

*[All take their seats. Pages dart to and fro, laughter
and much talking.]*

ARTHUR. *[Rises.]*

My knights and ladies of the Table Round
I bid you welcome to our feast again.
Across the world this goodly company
Hath scattered, to uphold the right in power,
To overthrow oppression, banish wrong,
And give the poor protection by your strength.
Right well each one hath quit himself in battle
And some are here, returned through many toils,
And some are slain; wherefore we drink to all.
Here in the cup that pledges all our order
Let healths be drunk to them that have returned
And peace to them that perished by the way.
I pledge the Table Round.

[Lifts the loving cup and drinks.]

OMNES.

Long live King Arthur!

GUENEVERE.

I pledge all Britain.

OMNES.

Long live Queen Guenevere!

[The cup passes from hand to hand, carried by KAY.]

GARETH.

I pledge the lovely lady Isabel.

PALAMEDES.

Why, man, be not so stingy with your pledges.
I pledge the fairest lady in the land,

Lady Madeline-Enid-Dearwyn-Isabel-Lynnette!

[*Laughter.*]

ISABEL.

Your Saracen tricks are not yet all forgot,
Good Sir Palamedes.

PALAMEDES.

These are but few.
I could love many more and yet not suffer.

TRISTRAM.

I pledge the noblest fellow of us all,
Sir Launcelot.

OMNES.

Launcelot! Launcelot!

ARTHUR.

There is a seat reserved beside the Queen.
For him whom all the court holds highest honor.
Sir Launcelot, I bid you to that seat.

LAUNCELOT. [*Slowly rising.*]

I pray you, sir, forgive me. I am not worthy.

ARTHUR.

What, is the honor seat so lightly prized?

LAUNCELOT.

Too high, my lord, for me to dream of it.

ARTHUR.

What foolery is this? Come take that seat.

LAUNCELOT.

Your pardon, sir. I cannot—and I will not.

ARTHUR.

Are you not held the Queen's own champion?
[ARCHBISHOP *pulls his sleeve and whispers in his ear.*]
Perhaps, then, you have vowed humility?

LAUNCELOT.

Even so, my lord. A vow I may not break.

ARTHUR.

Why, then, since you will not accept the seat,—
No other man shall take it.

GERAINT.

I pledge you, Enid.

MADELINE.

Sir Launcelot, then tell us of your vow.
Three years you have on wild adventures gone,
And never a word to tell what wondrous deeds.

ARTHUR.

Yea, tell me; have you been to Ireland, Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT. [*Rising.*]

I have, my lord.

ARTHUR.

Even now I have received a messenger
That he is sending here ambassadors,
Two knights of great renown, Mador and Patrick.
Do you know them?

LAUNCELOT.

Sir, I have heard their names.

ARTHUR.

Man, why are you so sullen-black and gloomy?
This is a feast day, not a funeral.

LAUNCELOT.

Even so, my lord.

[ARTHUR *shrugs his shoulders and turns to Archbishop.*]

GAWAINE.

Perhaps you have a vow of silence too?

LAUNCELOT *takes his seat without replying.*]

PALAMEDES.

Plague take your vows. Now I had hoped to hear
The story of your wanderings and your wars.

GAWAINE.

Perhaps it is as well he keepeth silence.

LAUNCELOT.

What mean you, sir?

GAWAINE.

Perhaps some ancient story
Not to the credit of the Table Round
Might force a place through your unwilling lips.

DEARWYN.

Gawaine, please leave Sir Launcelot alone!

GAWAINE.

There is a tale, not yet by all forgot
How once the paladin of chivalry
Rode in a muck-cart down the hangman's way—

TRISTRAM.

Now by the rood, why tell such stories here?

LAUNCELOT. [*In rage.*]Now by God's splendor, cub— [*draws sword.*]

GUENEVERE.

Nay, let us hear.

Who knows what secret shames beneath the shield
Of even the noblest traitor may be hid?

[LAUNCELOT glares from GAWAINE to the QUEEN.
Then, very gently, he replaces his sword, bows to
the unobserving KING, and goes to the door. The
court meanwhile is silent in amazement.]

[ARTHUR, noticing the sudden silence, looks up.]

ARTHUR.

Where go you now, Sir Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT.

Pray you, sir. Pardon me. I am not well.

ARTHUR.

Tut, man, sit down. You may not break the feast.

LAUNCELOT.

It is with pain, sir, that I do depart,
But I must go.

ARTHUR.

It lieth not with you
Nor any other man save me alone
To use that word of "must." Come, sir, sit down.

LAUNCELOT.

There is no man in Britain nor in France
Constrains me 'gainst my will.

[TRISTRAM goes hastily to LAUNCELOT.]

TRISTRAM.

Be not so hasty.
Come take your seat again, friend Launcelot.

LAUNCELOT.

'Tis twice this day that she has called me traitor.

TRISTRAM.

She does not mean it. Come, friend, come sit down.

LAUNCELOT.

But no man living, nay, nor woman neither
Has ever impeached Launcelot of treason.

TRISTRAM.

Bethink you that all women in their haste
Ofttimes use language that they reck not of.
You break the company's joy. Come, sir, sit down.
It is beneath your dignity to notice
The words of Sir Gawaine.

LAUNCELOT.

Why said she "traitor?"

[LAUNCELOT and TRISTRAM go slowly to their seats.]

ARTHUR. [To GUENEVERE.]

There is some dark unreason in the man
That comes of his French blood. Yet he is royal
And must be humored. Do not take him hardly.

ARCHBISHOP.

What of the young knights, sir?

ARTHUR.

Well thought. Sir Kay, bring in the candidates.

[Exit KAY, R.]

We have, sirs, for your judgment on this feast
Three young esquires, who seek the spurs of knight-
hood.

And one at least I think, will prove most worthy.

[Enter KAY with GAHERIS, UWAIN and GALAHAD,
all in white.]

My noble fellows of the Table Round

Look on these young esquires. They have been proven
And right well quit themselves in field and court.

KAY.

Look upon Gaheris, son of Sir Uriens of North
Wales; Uwaine, son of Sir Lamorak of Armorica;
Galahad, son of Sir Launcelot of the Lake, and see if
there be any fault in them.

LAUNCELOT.

Who dare present this Galahad as my son?

GALAHAD.

This locket, from the neck of my dead mother.
They told me it was precious in your sight.

GUENEVERE.

Dead!

LAUNCELOT.

It is the image of the Sangreal
I clasped around her neck when last we parted.
Boy, boy, how got you this?

GALAHAD.

The ancient hermit
Who cared for me when all beside were slain,
He bade me keep it till I found my father.

LAUNCELOT.

I do acknowledge it. This is my son.

ARTHUR.

[*Descends from his high seat. Draws sword, and gives accolade.*]

Rise, Sir Gaheris. Be courteous, brave and loyal.

Rise, Sir Uwayne. Be courteous, brave and loyal.

[*GALAHAD kneels. ARTHUR is about to knight him, but holds his hand.*]

Nay, Launcelot, but one hand shall knight your son,
And that his father's. Give him the accolade.

LAUNCELOT.

Never have I set eyes upon your face,

O Galahad, yet in your face I see

You are indeed the son of dead Elaine.

God make you good as you are beautiful

For beauty lack you not, as any living.

Rise, Sir Galahad; be trusty, true and loyal.

[*Thunder and lightning. The lights go out. The Sangreal, glowing a palpitating red, is seen for an instant.*]

CHOIR OF ANGELS.

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth;

Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua;

Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini.

Hosanna in excelsis. Amen.

[*As the lights come on again, GALAHAD is seen going out Left, with his sword held before him in the form of a cross.*]

ARTHUR.

The Sangreal!

ARCHBISHOP.

Now glory be to God!

LAUNCELOT.

Galahad, my son, O whither go you now?

GALAHAD.

I go to find the holy Sangreal;
My father, follow, follow!

[*Exit.*]

LAUNCELOT.

I come, I come. King Arthur, hear my oath.
Upon the hilt of this unshamed sword
As on the cross I swear to take my quest
And never turn aside for any cause
Until a year and till a day are past
Until I find the holy Sangreal.

GUENEVERE.

O Launcelot do not swear. O do not leave me.

LAUNCELOT.

What, changed again?

GUENEVERE.

I did not understand.

LAUNCELOT.

It is too late. I have sworn. Farewell, my lady.

TRISTRAM.

With you, my Launcelot, I take the quest!

GAWAINE.

Shall they all have the honor? I come too.

DEARWYN.

Gawaine, you shall not stir.

GARETH.

I swear!

GERAINT.

And I!

[*Court in confusion. Knights springing to their feet and swearing on their sword-hilts; ladies weeping and clinging to their arms. With a burst of cheering, the knights crowd out.*]

ARTHUR.

God, let thy precious balms not break my head.
How am I king, with all my knights away?

DEARWYN.

And they had only been at home an hour.
Our Lady knows when they shall come again.

ARCHBISHOP.

Lord, lettest thou thy servant go in peace
According to thy word; thy great salvation
Mine eyes have seen. Would God that I were younger;
I'd go with them to find the Sangreal.

Launcelot.

PINEL.

[*Finds MERLIN, lying stricken on the floor.*]
See, see, my lord the king. Merlin is here.

[*KAY and PINEL drag MERLIN forth.*]

ARTHUR.

How came that ancient Druid in these courts?

ARCHBISHOP.

I bade him hence ere midnight; on this feast
The courts are sanctuary.

PINEL.

He hid him there
Before the feast began; I saw him not.

ARCHBISHOP.

It was the Sangreal that struck him dead.
No unclean thing may look on that and live.

ARTHUR.

Yea, is he dead? Merlin gave me this sword,
That cannot be withstood by shield or mail.

[*MERLIN stirs and lifts one hand.*]

Are you alive, O butcher of Tananis?

ARCHBISHOP.

How could you see the Sangreal and not die?

MERLIN.

Had ye been Christian, I indeed were slain.
In faithful hearts alone your faith hath power.
And Britain's heart, O King, is pagan still.

ARTHUR.

Out, out, blasphemer!

ARCHBISHOP.

Nay, his words are true.

MERLIN.

Yet truly I am stricken unto death.

Take heed, take heed, King Arthur; for with me

All things that I bestowed must perish too.

That which you have, given by my magic power

Is stricken with me by the Sangreal.

ARCHBISHOP.

So your foul power is ended, thanks to God.

MERLIN.

Seen without faith the Sangreal shall slay.

The old gods wake, demanding sacrifice.

Tananis comes, to try his power with Christ.

The smell of blood grows heavy in the air.

I die, I die; but take you heed, King Arthur!

[Heavy knocking outside.]

ARTHUR.

Kay, take him hence. See if the knights be gone.

[KAY and PINEL take Merlin out.]

A weakling king indeed this day am I.

A page and fool and this fat seneschal

Are all the warriors that I may command.

[Heavy knocking outside.]

ARCHBISHOP.

What need of warriors, when the gift of God

Hath stirred in all our hearts to give us light?

ARTHUR.

But earthly kingdoms earthly arms require.

[Enter KAY followed by SIR MADOR and SIR PATRICK.]

KAY.

My lord, I found these strangers at the gate.

MADOR.

Greetings, King Arthur, lord of Britain's realm
From Ryence, King of Ireland. I am Sir Mador,
By him to you sent as Ambassador.
And this is Patrick, sir, my youngest brother.

ARTHUR.

You are most welcome, sirs, to this our court,
And shall be well received as fits your rank.
Sir Kay, give places at the banquet board.

PATRICK.

Forbear the question, sir, if it bites hard,
But are the knights of this your court all mad?

MADOR.

Pardon him, sir. He would not be discourteous.
But as we came up to your castle gate
We met a crowd of knights, all rushing forth,
All following one in white, who held his sword
Before him, crosswise, so; and one, a giant,
Wore a red lion on a surcoat black,
Wept as he went, but still he would not turn.

ARTHUR.

Indeed, sirs, you are come in evil time,
To find a-broken banquet, wined with tears.
A marvel hath appeared this Pentecost.
And all our knights are gone upon the quest.

MADOR.

Is not Sir Launcelot here?

GUENEVERE.

Why, that was Launcelot
Wept as he went, but still he would not turn.

MADOR.

It was to fight with Launcelot that I came.
There are no other knights in all the world
Save Launcelot and me. I am half resolved
To call him back.

GUENEVERE.
He would not turn for you!

MADOR.

No? But for this cause, lady, have I come;
To try my strength with Launcelot, and proclaim
My lady, Kathleen, fairest of all women,
Even fairer than the fair Queen Guenevere,
And prove it out on Launcelot by my sword.

GUENEVERE.

Be it so. Take then this bracelet to Kathleen,
Saying that Guenevere salutes her rival;
And take this fruit as evidence of goodwill.

[*She gives two apples to them, the poisoned one to*
PATRICK. PINEL *starts forward to snatch it from*
him, but is dragged back by KAY.]

PINEL. [*Struggling.*]

No, no, sirs, eat it not. There's poison there!

GUENEVERE.

Peace, peace, Pinel. You tax our patience sorely.
Try not your jesting at so ill a time.

KAY.

The fool is over-wrought by Merlin's death.

MADOR.

I bear grave messages of deep import
To you, King Arthur, from my lord King Ryence.

ARTHUR.

We'll hear them, shortly, when we are at leisure.

PATRICK. [*Screams.*]

Help! Help! St. Patrick, guard! It burns, it burns!
Brother—Mador,—Revenge! See, I am poisoned—

[*He staggers to center of stage and dies there.*]

MADOR.

Fiends of black hell, what treachery is this?

GUENEVERE.

O my sweet boy, what hand hath wrought this deed?

MADOR.

Behold, King Arthur; see, my brother's dead,
Poisoned, and by the hand of this, your queen.

ARTHUR.

How came this, Guenevere?

GUENEVERE.

I know not, Lord.

I knew not aught was wrong,—how could I tell?
Some evil thing has laid this trap for me!

[*She kneels beside* PATRICK.]

MADOR.

O dearest brother, do you lie so still?
Sweet voiced and graceful, slender as a girl,
The light and joy and comfort of our home—
Slain here by poison at the banquet-board—
God's blood, I will have justice, or my sword
Shall carve out justice for me!—

GUENEVERE.

O sweet Mary,
Whose hand hath done this deed?

MADOR.

What, will you blacken the fair name of Mary
By calling her with lips so stained with blood?

GUENEVERE.

I pray you, sir, use not such wild outcry.
Why think you I did this? I had no cause
To plot the death of this fair boy of yours—

MADOR.

That poison was intended as for me
Because I challenged here your boasted title
Fairest of flesh, when Launcelot was away.
You feared lest I should dispossess your claim
By virtue of main strength untruly held.

GUENEVERE.

O God, what monstrous calumny is this!
I had much more to think of than a boast—

MADOR.

Viper in woman's form—

ARTHUR.

Govern your tongue.

You speak to royalty.

MADOR.

Where was your royalty, snake-hearted jade,
When for the pin-prick of a challenged title
That I should prove Kathleen fairest of women
You poisoned me this apple? Now let the galled
world see

How far stabbed vanity stretches its revenge
When poisoned boys, betrayed at banquet tables
Must safeguard Britain's honor!

GUENEVERE.

Sir, be still.

MADOR.

Still? When the uncold blood of this my brother
Screams from the ground for vengeance? Still? My
shouts

Could not obscure that sound. I cry for justice.

ARTHUR.

None hath denied you justice, Irish knight.

MADOR.

Then swear before the dead to grant me justice.

ARTHUR.

That oath I swore when I became a king.
Just have I been in every cause I judged,
And shall be still while God shall give me life.

MADOR.

Swear this again!

GUENEVERE.

O Arthur, do not hear him.

MADOR.

What is your law? Your eyes have seen the deed.

ARTHUR. [*To ARCHBISHOP.*]

What is the law of Britain on this head?

ARCHBISHOP. [*Who is kneeling beside PATRICK.*]

May he rest in peace.—Sir, do not make me say what
is the law.

ARTHUR.

It is your office to declare the law.

ARCHBISHOP.

I never did it more unwillingly.

The penalty for treason at a feast

Is death by fire, that so the sacred right

Of hospitality be not abused.

LADIES.

By fire! woe, woe!

ARCHBISHOP.

And if one be accused

Yourself decreed, lord king, that there should be

Trial by combat.

ISABEL.

But the knights are gone.

PINEL.

My lord!

KAY.

Peace, fool. This is no time for you.

MADOR.

Has she no champion? Then dies she now!

ARTHUR.

Back, fool. Put up the sword. You shall have trial.

GUENEVERE.

But Launcelot is my champion, and hath sworn
Not to return until a year and day,
For any cause. See what your oaths have done.

MADOR.

'Twas not his oath that poisoned Patrick here.
This was the deed of Heaven, that none should die
Beneath my sword for your thrice guilty sake.

ARTHUR.

Has she no champion? Then I take the cause.
This is the magic sword Excalibur,
By fairies forged beneath the shaken sea;—
Dare you face it?

MADOR.

I dare. St. Patrick, aid me.
Yet if I fall by magic, not by might;
If tricks, enchanted swords and Druid spells
Bring Ireland's doom, and I by Patrick lie,
Know this, proud king; the stain of Ireland's blood
Shall never from your honor be effaced.
Her soul of poetry, by poison slain,
Her warrior strength by treachery o'ercome,
Shall rise to front you at your darkest hour,
And Ireland's fate at last be England's doom.

ARTHUR.

Have done with words. You have impeached the
queen,

Demanding combat. I have taken the cause.
Stand to your claim, Sir Mador!

[ARTHUR *draws Excalibur. The blade has turned
black.*]

LADIES.

Look! Look! The blade is black!

GUENEVERE.

The blade is black.

MADOR.

Your magic fails you at the hour of need.

ARCHBISHOP.

Where is Merlin? From his dark corner hiding
He works enchantment to entrap the King.

[*Exit PINEL.*]

My lord, you may not fight. Should you be slain,
We have no king; the Norsemen are in arms,
The Irish are embattled in the West.

Wait for the knights' return. You may not chance
The life of Britain on the hazardous sword.

MADOR.

Have done with words. I have impeached the Queen.
Your magic fails you. Take another sword!

[*Enter MERLIN, supported by KAY and PINEL.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

What heathen spell has here bewitched the King?
Excalibur is black.

MERLIN.

I die, I die.

This is the dreadful shadow of your doom.
Half Christian and half Pagan never yet
Maintained itself. The testing time is come,
O England, and you are unarmed to meet it.
Either be all, or none; faith, or the sword;
Christ, or Tananis; not by wretched cheat
The name of Christ above the breast of Thor.

ARCHBISHOP.

Answer the question; hast bewitched the sword?

MERLIN.

Yea, hark, my lord archbishop; for I tell
Things that your courage failed you still to say.
You too have paltered with a halfway creed,
Dimming your altars with a compromise.
Wherefore, O England, this has come to you!

ARTHUR.

Enough, enough; have you bewitched the sword?

MERLIN.

Not I; the sin he drew it to defend
Hath robbed it of its power. The Sangreal
Slays them it doth not save. Yea, this I say,
A Druid and a pagan; lo, your faith
Can only save the faithful.—Ho, I die!
But see; Tananis conquers half a Christ,
And he that parted Christ himself hath slain!
Look to yourselves. Death rides upon the air.
I die—but I have lived! Save yourself, Arthur!
[*He falls and dies.*]

MADOR.

Still Ireland challenges you, English king;
Will you fight now?

ARCHBISHOP.

This may not be, my lord.

ARTHUR.

This will I do. Content you, Irish knight.
I name this day three days when we shall fight.
Speed you, Pinel and Kay; take all the lackeys,
Go forth, find Launcelot, find all the knights;
Bring Launcelot back to take the Queen's defense.
He is her champion. But if he returns not
Then I will take the cause, let come what may.

MADOR.

I will fight now.

ARTHUR.

You shall obey the King.

MADOR.

Then patience, brother Patrick, till I send
Sir Launcelot's soul to bear you company.

[*Curtain.*]

ACT THREE.

SCENE ONE.

[*Half-Stage. Interior of hermit's cell in mid-forest. Altar at Right with door to inner cell near it. Outside door on Left. A discipline, or scourge, is lying on the altar steps. Enter HERMIT. Crosses stage and looks out of door at Left.*]

HERMIT.

The Scorpion is near set. Midnight is past.

[*Goes back to small inner door and calls.*]

Wake, boy. 'Tis time for mass. I will make ready.

[*To himself.*]

This day, ten years ago, she slew herself.

From midnight until noon I must say masses

For the repose of my sweet sister's soul.

Lord Jesus, in the tabernacle hidden,

Accept my penance, and assuage the pains

Elaine must suffer for her dreadful deed.

[*Kneels at altar steps and scourges himself.*]

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the
fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

[*Lashes himself again.*]

Hail Mary, full of grace—

[*Heavy knocking at outside door.*]

Who's there?

LAUNCELOT. [*Outside.*]

Open the door, holy man.

[*Hermit opens door. Enter GALAHAD and LAUNCELOT, in armor.*]

HERMIT.

Greeting, fair sirs. What would you here with me?

LAUNCELOT.

We seek for shelter and for absolution.

We are from Arthur's castle.

HERMIT.

Who is Arthur?

LAUNCELOT.

Say you, Who is Arthur? He is the King of Britain;
He is your master, priest.

HERMIT.

My master? Nay.

Hath Arthur lit these stars, or built these hills?
This brook that ripples past my lonely door,
Hath Arthur sent me that? Hark, how the birds
Do lazily chirp and croon in elfin sleep.
Doth Arthur feed them, think you?

LAUNCELOT.

Folly. No.

HERMIT.

My master doth all these things.—Who is Arthur!
[*Points to altar.*]

LAUNCELOT.

[*Uncovers his head and genuflects. GALAHAD kneels at altar, his sword upright before him.*]

I crave your pardon.—Do I know you, priest?

HERMIT.

I know not.

LAUNCELOT.

There rings a haunting echo in your voice
Of some sad melody that shook me, once,
And swelled my heart to bursting.—Who are you?

HERMIT.

A priest, no more. What once I was is dead.

LAUNCELOT.

That proud-poised head and long, firm-swinging arm,
Were never yet in cloistered arches bred.
You were a warrior.—Tell me, who were you?

HERMIT.

Priest am I, priest; knowing naught of Launcelot,
Nor Arthur, nor his court; sunk in these woods,
Naught hearing but the frogs and rain and wind.
My beard is matted with the dews of heaven;
For eight long years have I abided here,
By daily prayers and masses to repay
The sin of one most dear, who could not pray
For her own sin because—she slew herself.
What would you here with me, Sir Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT.

I would confess my sins and be absolved.
Two days ago, the day of Pentecost,
I was at feasting in King Arthur's court.
And then came angels and a mighty light,
And then appeared the holy Sangreal.
I took the quest to find that holy vessel,
And not to turn aside, for any cause,
Until a year and till a day be past.
So seek I absolution for my soul.

HERMIT.

Confess thy sins. The Lord be on thy lips
And in thy heart to grant thee true repentance.

LAUNCELOT. [*Kneels.*]

I have been right well thought of, and lo, now,
I am the most wretched man in all the world.
I have been victor of all men I met
Nor ever met I foe in foughten field
But bowed at last to me; and yet, O God,
What profits it me now? For my own soul
Towers up a foe against me, and I have
No weapons for the combat.

HERMIT.

Confess. Tell all.

LAUNCELOT.

Across the world an empty boast I spread,
That where injustice fed on tyranny,
Justice was there by my clean strength upheld.
Yet meanwhile I, enforcing faith of kings,
Rights of the poor, the freedom of small realms,
Proclaiming faith and honor among men—
I stole the heart from all these high pretenses
Defacing loyalty, outraging love,
By what I left at home.

HERMIT.

Tell all your sins.

LAUNCELOT.

For many sweet years I loved Queen Guenevere,
And she loved me. And she is Arthur's wife,
And Arthur is my friend, my liege, my king.
This is my sin.

HERMIT.

And is this all your sin?

LAUNCELOT.

So deeply in my soul this sin has burned
Small room was left for any lesser fault.
For all these years this precious jewelled sin
I cherished in my heart; calling it honor,

And courtly love, and knightly chivalry.
Yet all the while I travelled round the world,
The heart was empty of my high professions,
By this dishonor done against my own.

HERMIT.

There was no sin that roused the wrath of Christ
Except hypocrisy. The thief, the wanton,
He freely hath forgiven. The hypocrite
Cannot repent, therefore hath no forgiveness.

LAUNCELOT.

That is the fault that hath made Britain weak.
That gave the lie to all high deeds I did.
And in the presence of the Sangreal
That lie is stripped of all its chivalry.

HERMIT.

Will you now quit the fellowship of the Queen,
Nor ever in her company come again?
Will you swear this upon the crucifix?

LAUNCELOT.

What, priest?—What askest thou?—Must I do this?

HERMIT.

Would you have absolution and be clean?

LAUNCELOT.

Christ strengthen me! I swear!

HERMIT.

Will you abide here in my cell with me,
For forty days and nights, serving at mass,
Tending the altar here obediently?

LAUNCELOT.

This will I gladly do. 'Tis a small penance.

HERMIT.

And is this all your sin?

LAUNCELOT.

All I remember.

HERMIT.

Hast never felt the weight of one pure soul,
Lost for your sake, upon your conscience weigh?

LAUNCELOT.

What mean you now?

HERMIT.

Have you forgot Elaine?

LAUNCELOT.

Sir Torre! Her brother! Ha, I thought I knew you!

HERMIT.

For you she died, for hopeless love of you—
And for these eight long years have I lived here
Seeking God's pardon for her suicide—

LAUNCELOT.

What can I do, O Torre, to aid her now?

HERMIT.

O Launcelot, when you find the Sangreal,
There by the merit of that holy blood,
Pray that her sin be cleansed! Will you do this?

LAUNCELOT.

Most gladly, O most gladly!

HERMIT.

Praised be God,

Then my eight years have born their precious fruit.
Kneel then, my son; receive my absolution.

*Ego absolvo te, in nomine Patris et Filio et Spiritus
Sancti.*

Put off that armor and put on this robe.

And do you serve me here at midnight mass.
I have a boy brought from a nearby village,

Asleep so soundly he cannot be stirred.

Light all the candles; wait here till I vest. [*Exit R.*]

[*LAUNCELOT takes off his armor and puts on an old cassock.*]

LAUNCELOT.

Galahad, my son, help me do off this armor.—

No, pray for me. I need that service more.

[*Taking a taper, he lights it at the sanctuary lamp and then begins to light the candles at the altar.*]

[*Rapid footsteps outside. PINEL enters cautiously.*]

PINEL.

This way they went. I saw them in the moonlight;
I followed footprints till they brought me here.

[*He stumbles on LAUNCELOT'S armor. Recognizing it, he cries*]

'T is Launcelot's armor.—Who has slain Sir Launcelot?

GALAHAD.

'T is Launcelot has slain Launcelot. What would you?

[*On hearing his name, LAUNCELOT turns around from the altar. PINEL seeing him is amazed. LAUNCELOT turns again, with an effort, to the candles.*]

GALAHAD.

Go hence, vain fool. Bring not your follies here.

PINEL.

The Queen! She is in peril of her life!

Sir Launcelot, come.

GALAHAD.

He has forgot the Queen.

LAUNCELOT.

What say you of the Queen?

PINEL.

Lord Launcelot, come.

Sir Mador hath impeached her of treason

Because there was a murder at the feast.

The trial for combat must occur today.
She hath no champion; the King's sword is black;
And if Sir Mador wins, she shall be burnt;
Hasten, O haste, Sir Launcelot, and save her!

LAUNCELOT.

[*Springing down from altar.*]

Give me my armor!

GALAHAD.

Nay, you shall not stir!
What, will you break your oath so feather-quick?
Your soul shall be in peril if you go!

LAUNCELOT.

The Queen shall be in peril if I stay!
What is a soul worth, bought at such a price?
My armor, fool! My sword!
[*Enter HERMIT, in mass-vestments, old and tattered.*]

HERMIT.

Where go you now?

LAUNCELOT.

Delay me not, or load another death
Upon my weighted soul.

GALAHAD.

You shall not go,

HERMIT.

Have you forgot Elaine so instantly?

LAUNCELOT.

You, Galahad, you may seek the Sangreal.
'Tis not for such as I.

GALAHAD.

You shall not go,

My father, back to sin so late forsaken.

PINEL.

Hasten, O hasten, this day she must be saved.
The morning hastens on. O hasten, hasten.

GALAHAD.

You shall not go save over my dead body.

LAUNCELOT.

Stand aside, boy. I warn you, stand aside.

[*Draws sword.*]

HERMIT.

What, madman, Launcelot, will you slay your son?

LAUNCELOT.

I warn you stand aside.

GALAHAD.

Not while I live.

LAUNCELOT.

Then die!

[*Strikes him down, and exit.*]

HERMIT.

God help Elaine!

GALAHAD. [*Struggling up again.*]

God, pity Launcelot.

PINEL. [*Kneels.*]

May I remain here in Sir Launcelot's stead,
Out of this welter of the world gone mad?
It was my hand that in a weak revenge
For kicks and cuffs and curses without end
Poisoned the apple that hath wrought this thing.
They would not hear me when I sought to tell,
But hatched a mad conspiracy out of air.

HERMIT.

That is the essence of all courts and law,
To punish them who could have told the truth.

Lo now how great destruction has it launched
Upon a land long tending to its death!

HERMIT.

Lay hold of him, and bear him to my bed.

GALAHAD.

Sir, I shall live! the hurt within my soul
Is far more grievous than that on my body.

HERMIT.

Then, sirs, stay here. Sir Fool, I do absolve you;
Serve me at mass; pray for the world's redemption.
[*Goes to altar, GALAHAD and PINEL attending.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT THREE.

SCENE TWO.

[*Courtyard of Camelot Castle. Walls draped in black. A stake with fagots piled around it, at Left front. Judgment seat for ARTHUR Center rear.*]

[*Chanting heard in distance. A company of monks enters and circles the stage, chanting the Miserere.*]

[*Behind them come ladies of the court dressed in black. Then ARTHUR, ARCHBISHOP, KAY, SIR MADOR, and QUEEN GUENEVERE, supported by DEARWYN and ISABEL.*]

[*ARTHUR takes his seat upon the stage.*]

ARTHUR.

Sir Mador, stand. Do you repeat your charge?

MADOR.

I do. That on the feast of Pentecost
When I and my young brother, Patrick, sent
Ambassadors by Ryence, king of Ireland,
Sat at your board, trusting in your good faith,
This Guenevere poisoned for me an apple,
Moved by foul jealousy and black revenge,
Her champion being absent from the court,
Because I challenged her long-boasted claim
To be the fairest woman of all flesh.

It is your law that such a mortal charge
Be tried by mortal combat; and if guilty
She should be burnt in presence of the body.—
Come forth, my brother Patrick, and be witness.
[*Two monks bring forward the body of PATRICK upon a bier.*]

Three days have I beside my brother's body
Fasted and prayed that justice shall be done.
They seemed three centuries spent by Ireland's tomb.
For all she held most precious—all her music,
Her poetry, her treasure, art and song,—

Lie stricken down by English treachery.
It is not I that make the charge, King Arthur;
Behold the still accuser at your feet!

ARCHBISHOP.

She hath denied the crime. Doth not that quit you?

MADOR.

Shall words restore my brother back to life?

ARTHUR.

Stand forth, my Queen, and answer to this charge.

GUENEVERE.

So stand I forth to ask, how came I here?
Who am I? Queen of Britain? Or vile slave
Trapped in iniquity in some foul den,
Dragged, bound, before my judges? How came I
And this black stake, to stand both here together?
I fear not death; that know you well, King Arthur.
But this great shame, to put me here for trial
Before the rabble gathered to behold,
To quit me of a crime I could not do—
Lord, in your mind is there one least suspicion
I killed this boy?

ARTHUR.

Nay, lady, not an instant.

GUENEVERE.

Then why do I stand here?

ARTHUR.

It is the law.

GUENEVERE.

I am above the law!

ARTHUR.

I swore an oath,

And even I am not above my oaths,
But keep them all with proud punctilio.
Sweet lady, be content. God still is gracious,
And he will see that justice shall be done.

MADOR.

That is my trust; and therefore I demand,
Where is her champion?

ARTHUR.

Have the knights returned?

KAY.

Nay, sir, there is not one of them come back.

ARTHUR.

Then I shall take the challenge. Bring my sword.

GUENEVERE.

Nay, Arthur, once again I pray you hear me.
Why will you put me to this open shame?
If there was love in any word or sigh
You breathed when you wooed me in Cameliard;
When I, girl, but sixteen, looked up and saw,
Beneath the golden splendor of your helm,
Your boyish brow, wild with the light of war,
Soften to me; if you do still remember
The moss-green log, behind the old yew hedge,
Where we would sit and hear the falling water
Ripple between sweet silences of love—
O Arthur, Arthur, do you love me still?

ARTHUR.

My Guenevere, you know how well I love you.

GUENEVERE.

Then send this wild knight to his home in chains!

ARTHUR.

Shall this be England's justice?—Draw, Sir Mador!

[ARTHUR *draws his sword. The blade is black.*]

What bungling fool gave this sword back to me?

This is Excalibur. Its strength is gone.

Give me another sword!

ARCHBISHOP.

This must not be.

My lord, you may not fight. For England's sake,

Remember what the kingdom now confronts.
Should you be slain, the Queen must then be burnt
By proof thereof. England will have no king;
War and dissension will lay waste the realm;
The Saxons will invade us from the East,
And this wild knight will lead his Irish hordes
To claim revenge and tribute from our land.
Lay by the battle till her champion come;
So shall our land at least preserve its king.

MADOR.

Has she no champion? Then dies she now!
This was God's doing, that none else should suffer
For her thrice guilty sake.

ARCHBISHOP.

Sir, you must choose;
England or Guenevere.

MADOR.

How can you pause?
England is fair and honest, clean and pure;
But this damned thing you call Guenevere—

ARTHUR.

Devils and hell! Sirs, she is still my wife.
Before I was a king, I am a man.
Give me another sword; I will defend her.
What is this talk that I must needs be slain?

MADOR.

Ye all were brave when that enchanted sword
Gave you a vantage over mortal men.
Now that the magic power is withdrawn
See how you choose and hesitate and fear!

ARTHUR.

Now, by St. Paul, give me Excalibur.
Be its blade black or white or sound or broken
I'll have no other sword!

ARCHBISHOP.

Sir, you must not;

It means your death.

ARTHUR.

By God, what matter then?

Must I stand here, lapped in these kingly robes,
And see this vile knave taunt my queen to death?

GUENEVERE.

O Arthur, is this true? Will you risk death
And England, for my sake? Sir, do you love me
Even more than England? Go to the combat, go
Lord of my life! I knew not that you loved me.

ARTHUR.

Draw now! Arthur is England's justice. Draw!

ARCHBISHOP.

Alas, for England's sake I must do this.
My lord, your queen has been untrue to you.

ARTHUR.

False dog of hell, what blasphemy is this?
[ARCHBISHOP points to the Queen. ARTHUR turns
suddenly on her. She tries to meet his gaze, shrinks,
shudders, and falls prostrate at his feet.]

GUENEVERE.

Had I but known! Ah God, had I but known!

ARTHUR.

Who has done this? What foul fiend has betrayed me?
[Looks around bewildered. All turn aside from his
gaze. Only the ARCHBISHOP gazes steadily into his
eyes.]

ARTHUR.

O no! Not Launcelot! No,—not my best friend!

MADOR.

King, one blow shall avenge both you and me!

[Swings his sword above her.]

ARTHUR.

Save that for me. If this strange thing is true,
And you indeed have been untrue to me,
So much the more, beloved Guenevere,
Should I be true to you. And now the rather
Can I face death; for I can live no longer.
Take up your sword, Sir Mador.

MADOR.

Nay, sir, tarry;
Now can I wait for Launcelot with good will,
Knowing that I shall champion honor thus
To rid the world of evil at one blow.

ARTHUR.

What, will you palter and grow hot and cold,
Demanding fight, then shrinking from the sword?
Draw, dog of Ireland, lest I slay you now.

ARCHBISHOP.

Will you still risk the kingdom? Hearken, then;
In mortal flames the Queen must purge her sin,
Or else in everlasting. I forbid you
Lift up your sword, lord king, upon this quarrel.
Obey, or both your souls shall burn in hell.

ARTHUR.

Where did you learn the secrets of all hell?
This passes my belief, that any God
Could treat his children so.

ARCHBISHOP.

So—do you dare?

Then by the power of this most awful office
Which holds the keys of heaven and of hell,
I here pronounce the blighting curse of God
Upon all England, for the presumptuous sin
Of England's head, and Arthur's blasphemy,
If in this quarrel you lift up your sword!

COURT AND PEOPLE.

Arthur, save us! Arthur, save us!

ARCHBISHOP.

The fate of unborn England hangs on you.

ARTHUR.

O God, how shall I choose?

[*He covers his head with his mantle for a moment. Then throwing it down with an air of resolution, is about to announce his decision, when the castle bell starts a violent ringing. Cheers without. The cry of "Launcelot! Launcelot!" is raised. Wild cheering on the stage. LAUNCELOT dashes in, covered with dust and mud.*]

LAUNCELOT.

Is this the dog that would have burnt the Queen?

MADOR.

Stay, you are weary. Take your breath awhile.

LAUNCELOT.

I will fight now!

[*They fight. The court and people crowd around them, cheering ceaselessly. MADOR is slain. The crowd scatters, disclosing MADOR lying on the ground and LAUNCELOT clasping GUENEVERE in his arms.*]

ARTHUR.

God, would that death had saved me from this hour.

ARCHBISHOP.

England is saved!

LAUNCELOT.

Is this the king that would stand idly by
To see his Queen burnt up before the rabble?

Coward, dog, jackal, mockery of a king,

Blot on the name of Britain, she is mine!

No more is Guenevere a queen to you;

My arm has saved her, and my arm shall keep!

ARTHUR.

Now by St. Michael, come such words from you?
Betrayers of my honor and my love,
Look to your life, Sir Launcelot!

LAUNCELOT.

War is here declared
To take this weakling from the throne of Britain!

[*Curtain.*]

ACT FOUR.

[Interior of the Chapel of the Sangreal at Glastonbury. Over the high altar is a baldacchino with hanging curtains throwing it into gloom: Candles are burning before the side altar of St. Mary. GUENEVERE and SISTER EVELYN are discovered praying.]

GUENEVERE.

If I could know—the battle, oh the battle!
All England rocks in war because of me.
Launcelot and Arthur at this very hour
Are lapped in conflict, but three miles away;
Perhaps, this very moment, he lies dead!—

EVELYN.

Sweet sister, calm yourself. Be not so troubled!

GUENEVERE.

But know you what mad hounds of terror prey
Upon my haunted soul?

EVELYN.

I know naught of you.
For these three months you have abided here
And none of us has even learned your name.

GUENEVERE.

Would you know me, even if you knew my name?

EVELYN.

I know not. Nothing know I of the world.

GUENEVERE.

Would God, would God I did not! To its dregs
I have drained the foaming cup of worldly splendor.
All England bowed the knee, and all the world
Gave me the name of fairest of all women—

EVELYN.

Are you Queen Guenevere?

GUENEVERE.

Ah, sweet, sweet sister,
Despise me not, because I was that queen!

EVELYN.

Nay, lady, weep not so. Be comforted.

GUENEVERE.

I know, I know what curses hourly roll
Against black heaven, borne on the billowing smoke
Of cottages aflame because of me;
What quivering execrations on my name
Are heaped by wild-eyed women above new mounds
Where lie their slain. There's not one lightest curse
But finds its mark; and every poisoned arrow
Strikes full weight on my soul. I bear the hate
Of all the women of England. O, for God's sake,
Leave me not here alone, with my own soul!

EVELYN.

Would you that I sing to you?

GUENEVERE.

Pray you, do.

EVELYN. [*Sings.*]

Far o'er the rim of the roaring sea,
Under the beckoning twilight star,
Glitters a city of mystery,
Whose gates ever stand ajar,
Dear refuge from storm or woe.
There the poor may lay their sorrows away
And the sick may forget to weep.

And bright dreams over the wanderer hover,
Sage or warrior, fool or lover;
Come, come away, on the wings of the Day,
To the beautiful city of Sleep.

GUENEVERE.

Where got you that sweet song?

EVELYN.

'T was a young knight
Stayed in the abbey here three months ago,
Caught by the tempest. By the abbess' will
He sang for me, after the evening meal.

GUENEVERE.

For you alone?

EVELYN.

Nay, lady, all of us.

But all so sweet his voice was, and so lovely,
It seemed to me he sang for me alone.
I thought, could I but always be by him
It would be so much easier to be good.
Tell me; is it not easier for a woman
To live uprightly, and do always well,
If she but have a man's love help her so?
It seems their strength should always help our weak-
ness,

Who are so weak without them.

GUENEVERE.

Ah, sweet sister,
Much misery were you spared, who know no men.

EVELYN.

He had his brother with him; a rough knight,
Loud-voiced and strong. They were ambassadors
From overseas. I think they both were Irish.
His name was Patrick—

GUENEVERE.

Sister, sweet, no more!

O God, could not my sin have spared me this,
To set me here beside a pure white soul,
To show even me how black my own has been?
Patrick, dear heart, shall wait for you in heaven—
How can I tell whose hand hath sent him there?
Sweet Christ, what shames are yet reserved for me!

EVELYN.

Why will you not come join our sisterhood?
There's peace behind the veil.

GUENEVERE.

How can it be?

Such deep unshaken strength in this light weave
Which even a summer's zephyr sweeps aside,
To be a wall 'gainst devil-howling tempests
That rave on me?

EVELYN.

There's peace behind the veil.

GUENEVERE.

How strange comes this word "peace" upon my ears!
I know not what it means. Sweet, is there peace,
Can there be peace, while Guenevere yet lives?

EVELYN.

Know you this place?

GUENEVERE.

It hath a dismal look.

EVELYN.

It is the chapel of the Sangreal.
There, on that altar, through the holy years,
The sacred chalice stood, till by man's sin
And woman's weakness it was reft away.
'T was here the pilgrims knelt; and there the king
Who dared profane this holy place by lust
Was smitten by the Spear that pierced Christ's side.

GUENEVERE.

O why was I set in this sacred place?

EVELYN.

'Tis said the Sangreal shall reappear
When a great King shall here renounce a love
As great as that which made King Pelles sin,
And brought destruction down on Glastonbury.

GUENEVERE.

And then shall there be peace upon the world?

EVELYN.

I do not know; but, if there shall be war,
It shall be not for any lesser cause
Than that for which Christ died upon the tree,
To tear down Mammon's rule, and make earth heaven.

LAUNCELOT.

Where got you this deep wisdom?

EVELYN.

'T was the bishop
Who told us this. He says it must be soon,
Or else the world shall all dissolve in blood.

[Screams without. Enter DEARWYN, weeping.]

DEARWYN.

Gawaine is dead! Gawaine! Gawaine! Gawaine!

GUENEVERE.

O Dearwyn, sweet, what news is this?

DEARWYN.

Touch me not!
You and your Launcelot, with adulterous kisses
Have slain my love. Gawaine!

[Falls weeping before the altar.]

GUENEVERE.

O Dearwyn, Dearwyn,
Have I lost even you?

DEARWYN.

Gawaine is dead!

GUENEVERE.

God help poor women! We can do naught but pray.
[*Enter GALAHAD, the HERMIT, and PINEL, in cassock over his fool's dress. HERMIT walks with hands up-lifted and a strange ecstasy upon his face.*]

HERMIT.

This way the voices call me.—See you there!
[*Points to the altar.*]

GALAHAD.

What see you there, my father? I see naught.

HERMIT.

Behold! three crosses on the altar raised;
And on the midmost one, with jests and cursing,
They nail the Son of God!

PINEL. [*Kneels.*]

I cannot see it.

GUENEVERE.

It is a madman.

EVELYN.

Lady, say not so.

Perchance he sees when wiser eyes are blind.

GUENEVERE.

'T was wisdom brought the world to this destruction.
There was a time when I thought I was wise;
See how we wise have ruined all mankind!

HERMIT.

Hark, how he pleads for pity on the world;
How clear his voice rings down the centuries.

[*Chants.*]

"*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*"

EVELYN.

This is not madness.

GUENEVERE.

'T is the wise are mad.

[*Knocking outside. The voice of PAUL the page cries*]

PAUL.

The Queen, where is the Queen? I must speak to her.

NUNS. [*Outside.*]

The Queen is not here, boy.

PAUL.

She is here. I must see her.

EVELYN. [*Calling through door.*]

The Queen is here.

[NUNS crowd in, exclaiming, with PAUL, sorely wounded.]

PAUL.

Madame, the King is dead. [*Faints.*]

NUNS.

The King is dead! Woe, woe!

GUENEVERE.

Paul, what of Launcelot?

ABBESS.

Madame, he is sore wounded. Let him rest.

GUENEVERE. [*Shakes him.*]

Paul, what of Launcelot?

PAUL.

Launcelot is dead too. There are many dead.

I think that I am dying.

NUN.

Paul, come with me.

PAUL.

No! I must go to Launcelot and the King. [*Dies.*]

ABBESS.

He is dead, poor boy. Come, let us lay him here.

[*Nuns take up PAUL'S body and place him on a bench set lengthwise before the main altar, with six candles arranged around it.*]

HERMIT. [*Chanting.*]

This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.

GUENEVERE.

Launcelot is dead—is dead!

EVELYN.

Sweet lady, do not faint.

DEARWYN. [*Goes to her and embraces her.*]

O Guenevere, I know, I know, I know!

[*Enter ARCHBISHOP unobserved.*]

GUENEVERE.

Launcelot is dead! [*To ABBESS.*] Lady, will you admit me

A member of this sacred sisterhood?

For these three months I have abided here

And kept the novice's rule. I crave for peace.

All those I love are dead.

ABBESS.

Are you the Queen?

GUENEVERE.

I was the Queen. I pray, be that forgotten.

ABBESS.

It is unusual. I know not what to say.

ARCHBISHOP.

It is well thought; that you and Launcelot

May die in this one day, that peace may come.

Look, how you forced me with your twisted loves

To trick and palter in un-Christian ways,

Dimming the altar with a compromise,

To save an earthly kingdom. Christ has failed

To bring down peace on earth, goodwill to men,

Because that we, who wear his crucifix

That pledged us to the nation of the poor,

Divide our loyalty to this world's kings,

And make of Christ a tag of heraldry.

GUENEVERE.

My lord, that awful sentence you pronounced,
That I must burn on earth or else in hell,
May it not be relaxed? For I would meet
My loved ones yet in heaven; and I am sure
That no just God would damn him, for my fault.

ARCHBISHOP.

If you present your body unto God,
A living sacrifice to do his will,
Nursing the poor, and caring for the sick,
Your sins may be atoned, your soul be cleansed.

GUENEVERE.

Thanks be to God—and may I do this now?

DEARWYN.

And may I come with her, to take the veil?

ARCHBISHOP.

In time of war all rules must be relaxed.
I will admit you both, if you agree
To take this day irrevocable vows.

GUENEVERE.

Sir, that is my desire, to build around me
A wall that earthly tempests may not break,
To bring me peace.

DEARWYN.

And I.

ARCHBISHOP.

Then come with me.

HERMIT. [*Chanting.*]

Woman, behold thy son!—Behold thy mother!

ARCHBISHOP.

Who calls?

EVELYN.

A madman, sir, who looks on Christ.

ARCHBISHOP.

Does he see Christ? God, grant to me that vision!

[They all go to the side altar of St. Mary, where the ARCHBISHOP performs a brief ceremony of admission; GUENEVERE and DEARWYN being clothed with a white veil.]

[Meanwhile enter KAY, L.]

KAY.

Thank the saints, a shelter at last. The villain scoundrels caught me beneath the provision wagon. "Which side are you for?" they asked. "Which side are you for?" said I. "I am for that side too." Then they would have run me through the body, but I dodged beneath the wagon and escaped.—Well, so ends the battle. King Arthur is dead and Launcelot is the king. I saw him wearing the crown with my own eyes. Now let him wed the Queen, or kill her, as liketh him, so a man may have his three meals a day in peace. God rest my soul; I am fearful tired.

[Lies down and sleeps.]

[Enter GARETH, TRISTRAM, GERAINT, and PALAMEDES bearing the body of KING ARTHUR on a bier. They lay it down beside PAUL.]

GARETH.

Paul, are you there? No fitter mate could be
To lie so close beside a stainless king.

GALAHAD.

What knights are you, and what is this you bear?

GERAINT.

Here lies the knightliest corse man ever wore,
King Arthur, kingliest even in his death.

GALAHAD.

Yea, is this all that you can say of Arthur,
His best and kingliest deed is but to die?

O Arthur, you have struck the knell of kings,
Who serve their people best in leaving them.

GARETH.

What knight is this that lacking sword and armor
Taunted King Arthur's knights before him slain?

GALAHAD.

Swords have ye all, and how have they prevailed
Save to bring death and agony to Britain?

PALAMEDES.

This is that knight which sought the Sangreal
And drew all Arthur's fighting men away.
Thence hath destruction come upon the land.

GALAHAD.

Yea, if ye followed it, why turned ye back
So soon to swords and blood and desolation?
What profit got ye from your glory's quest?
This hermit here and I for these three months
Have followed on the track of your wild swords,
Tending the wounded, burying the slain.
Now that the land is covered with despair
Ye stand, four knights who sought each other's blood,
Clasping your hands around this kingly dead.
Why clasped ye not your hands around the living,
And saved these myriad lives and homes destroyed?

GERAINT.

Is this the son of Launcelot, speaking so?

GALAHAD.

And should not Launcelot's blood rebuke his evil?

GERAINT.

Evil! Call you your father's glory evil?
What manner of son is this?

GALAHAD.

Is it not strange
How like this knightly glory is to maggots,
That only feed on corpses.

PALAMEDES.

Silence, sirs—

What are they doing in the corner there?

TRISTRAM.

They are veiling two new nuns.

GERAINT.

Is the Queen here?

TRISTRAM.

She should be here. I know that Launcelot sent her.
In truth, I brought her here with Lady Dearwyn.

GERAINT.

Tell me, is Launcelot dead?

PALAMEDES.

No; he is king.

'T was Arthur crowned him, with his dying hands.

"Launcelot," said he, "'t is you must wear this crown."

But Launcelot was loth. "I am not worthy,"

Said he, "to take this circlet from your hand."

"'T is true," said Arthur, "'t is a bitter choice.

And yet I must do this, for knighthood's sake,

Lest some base commoner usurp this power,

And overthrow our glorious chivalry,

Building some foul republic on its ruin."

GARETH.

The crown by right is mine. Gawaine is dead,
And I stand next.

PALAMEDES.

Take it from Launcelot, then,

But do not ask us all to fight for you.

GARETH.

No, by God's death, I 'd rather die in chains

Than plunge poor Britain back in blood again.

With right good grace I yield it up to Launcelot.

[*Enter LAUNCELOT, L., wearing the golden crown.*]

TRISTRAM.

Behold, the king.

GARETH.

Welcome, King Launcelot.

[*They kneel, save GALAHAD and the Hermit.*]

LAUNCELOT.

I pray you, stand, sirs. Do not kneel to me;
I am anointed with the blood of Britain,
And crowned with flame. My robe is all remorse.

GALAHAD.

Gramercy for your rede. I did not kneel.

LAUNCELOT.

What, Galahad, boy? I thought that I had slain you.
Now God be praised that you are living still.

GALAHAD.

Then God must needs be damned for all those slain.
You had the will to slay me; and to you
I am dead indeed.—Now let the world adore;
King Launcelot is of all men most renowned,
Who with his sword hath slain his son unarmed
That he might break an oath he swore to God.
You have run true to the whole breed of kings.

LAUNCELOT.

Boy, would you have me let the Queen be burnt?

GALAHAD.

With these own eyes I saw two thousand homes
Burnt by the flames your warring hosts have lit.
Women and children, girls and tottering men
Slain in all manner; tortures, wounds and death
Stalking abroad across the land of Britain;—
To save one queen, ten thousand commoners die.
Were it not cheaper to destroy all kings,
End the whole breed at once, who while alive
Load mankind grievously with fruitless splendor,
And, dying, cost so sore a tax of blood?

No whit the better you loved Guenevere
 Than any of these peasants loved his wife,
 Who now must mourn, in anguished widowhood,
 An echo to your roundelays of lust.

GERAINT.

Sir, he is mad; he hath seen the Sangreal.

TRISTRAM.

The body of King Arthur lies behind you.

LAUNCELOT.

I scarce dare look on his still face again.

[*He approaches the body from L., as GUENEVERE, veiled in the nun's habit, approaches it from the Right. They see each other across the body of ARTHUR.*]

GUENEVERE.

Launcelot! Launcelot! They told me you were dead!

HERMIT. [*Chanting.*]

My God, my God, why hast thou forgotten me?

LAUNCELOT.

What mean these robes? What means this hanging veil?

ARCHBISHOP.

She is a nun. You dare not touch her, King.

[*Thrusts crucifix between them.*]

LAUNCELOT.

You have not sworn irrevocable vows?

GUENEVERE.

But what weight are such oaths? I thought you dead.
 Come, take me, Launcelot!

ABBESS.

What words are these?

You are the bride of heaven, and may no more
 Look for an earthly love.

GUENEVERE.

Heaven would not have
A bride so all unwilling. Launcelot,
Why do you wait and palter? Is your love drowned
In all these seas of blood you shed to gain it?
Come take me now!

LAUNCELOT.

Nay, madame, I am king!
Shall I begin to rule unhappy England
By ravishing a nun? I cannot take you!

GUENEVERE.

Coward, are you afraid of this gray priest,
Or will these women balk you of your will?
Why, Launcelot, all these years we two have loved
While I was yet the wedded wife of Arthur.
Vows I had taken then; you thought naught of them.
Why do you spurn me now? Are you so changed,
Or am I now unfit to be your queen
Because I yielded, when 't was you who wooed?

ARCHBISHOP.

Peace, peace! What, shall a nun use words like these?
Destruction have you brought upon the land
With this wild love;—now seek the peace of God.

LAUNCELOT.

There is a fearful power in this gold circlet
Stronger than brazen chains; 't is not an honor,
It is a prison cell.

GUENEVERE.

So Arthur spake,
And you—you called him coward, and made war.

LAUNCELOT.

But now, with this cursed crown upon my brow,
I know what Arthur meant.

GUENEVERE.

Will you condemn me
To live a prisoner in this funeral gloom,
With sickly candles and incense all my days,
When bright warm love calls me so loud,—in vain?

LAUNCELOT.

It cracks my heart to bursting to behold you,
And I am sweating blood; but for my manhood
I cannot take you now.

GUENEVERE.

What holds you back?

LAUNCELOT.

'Tis Arthur, dead;—stronger than Arthur, living.

GUENEVERE.

Then will you leave me here in living death
While you shall reign upon a lordly throne?

LAUNCELOT.

That may not be.—Arthur, you gave the crown;
To you, then, I restore it.

[*Lays crown upon KING'S bier.*]

—Give me a robe.

I'll be religious too.

TRISTRAM.

Madman, what mean you?

LAUNCELOT.

I'll be a priest, and spend my life in praying.

ARCHBISHOP.

Yea, are you even faithless to this trust
That dying Arthur hath bequeathed to you?
Who else is there that may protect the land
Against the folly that your sins have wrought?

LAUNCELOT.

Yet there are things, my lord, no man can do;
And I could not be king, with Guenevere
Shut in a convent cell, me on a throne.

GERAINT.

You cannot mean this. Launcelot, you are mad.

LAUNCELOT.

This is the first hour I have not been mad,
Daft, crazed with evil love, in all these years.
For lo, that courtly chivalry of France
Which I imbibed with my mother's milk,
Is all dishonored with this evil love
Wherewith I have cursed Britain—yea, and you!

HERMIT. [*Chanting.*]

I thirst!

GUENEVERE.

My knight, my knight, will you stab loving so?

LAUNCELOT.

Lo, how the hand of God works evenly.
We two were our own world, and our own souls
Were to become our heaven; and see, now,
They are our hell; and we cannot escape.

GUENEVERE.

Sweet Mary, send me death.

LAUNCELOT.

It is too much, even to ask for death.
We have not earned the sweet deliverance.—
Crown Gareth here; he is the King's next nephew
And he will make a better king than I.

ARCHBISHOP.

Nay, there is one to whom the crown belongs;
The king's son must take up his father's title.
Receive it, Galahad; bring the land to peace.

GALAHAD.

A church forsworn holds out a bloody crown.
How often could your word have cleared the air
With one true utterance! But your voice was choked
With too much swallowing of lascivious crumbs
From any master's table, save of God.

GARETH.

Do you refuse it?

GALAHAD.

Give it to me, sir.

Lo, how the glitter of this molten mud
Lures us like swampfire into hideous marsh
Wherein, all blood and brains and rotting flesh,
Lie earth's young splendid millions, all destroyed.
How heavy a price is paid for England's crown!
Think you 't is worth the cost?

GERAINT.

Scorning it so

You cannot wear it.

GALAHAD.

Nay, I'll be the king,
And build such court as men have never seen,
Of artisans and blacksmiths, serfs and poets;
No nobleman dare venture in its bounds;
Even as Christ, to found his commonwealth,
Chose fishermen, and scorned the Pharisees.

ARCHBISHOP.

O Galahad, this have I always taught!

GALAHAD.

Taught—yes; with ceaseless streams of empty words.
What one thing have you done to bring them true?
Tied hand and foot to this old game of kings,
What have you done, but sanctified their folly,
Called men to slaughter, and wept above them slain?
Old church, you have enthroned hypocrisy.
Take off the miter; lay the crozier down;
Here is fit shepherd for the flock of Christ,
This hermit, who beholds and hears and feels
The agony of redemption ye forgot.

ARCHBISHOP.

Right gladly do I lay this burden off me.
Sir Torre, if in that lonely hermit cell
Your eyes have learned to see the face of Christ
Through all the clouds and trickeries of this world,
Guide us, who lost our way, to see him too.—
Who shall be chancellor?

GALAHAD.

The wisest man
That I have met in all the realm of Britain.
One who spoke the truth,—was laughed at for a fool.
One who spoke wisdom, and writhed beneath your
scorn.

Ye holding truth and wisdom to be madness.
Rise, Sir Pinel, and be my chancellor.
Rule Britain for me; for I shall go forth
And through the crowded huts and lonely cabins
Where young men sit and wonder at the stars,
I'll rouse the soul of Britain with strong words
To end at once this wretched masquerade
That cloaks the world with monstrous agony.
Wherever two or three are met together
There shall you hear the voice of Galahad
For a new war to put an end to kings.

[*The SANGREAL appears upon the high altar.*]

ARCHBISHOP.

Behold!—The Sangreal!

GALAHAD.

O blood that burst from the rent heart of Christ,
Thrill still in all our veins! There is no change
Of color or of warmth or of rich texture
That marks off king from peasant, nor one nation
From all its kindred nation; yea, behold,
The Blood of God runs in the veins of man,
And all the nations are one brotherhood.

The Sangreal as God's own beacon burns
To call us to this knowledge; for his own kin
Are all that labor, gripping hands with him
To make the world a home for all his children.
Hark, how it calls! Its pulsing echoes swell
Deeper and vaster till at last it drowns
This noise of strife, this agony of despair;
The Sangreal shall burn in all our souls,
One blood shall pulse in all our kindred veins,
And all the hosts of men shall dwell in peace.

ARCHBISHOP.

*It is finished! Father, into thy hands I commend
my spirit.*

HERMIT.

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto!

ALL.

*Sicut erat in principio, et nunc et semper; per
omnia saecula saeculorum, Amen.*

[Curtain.]

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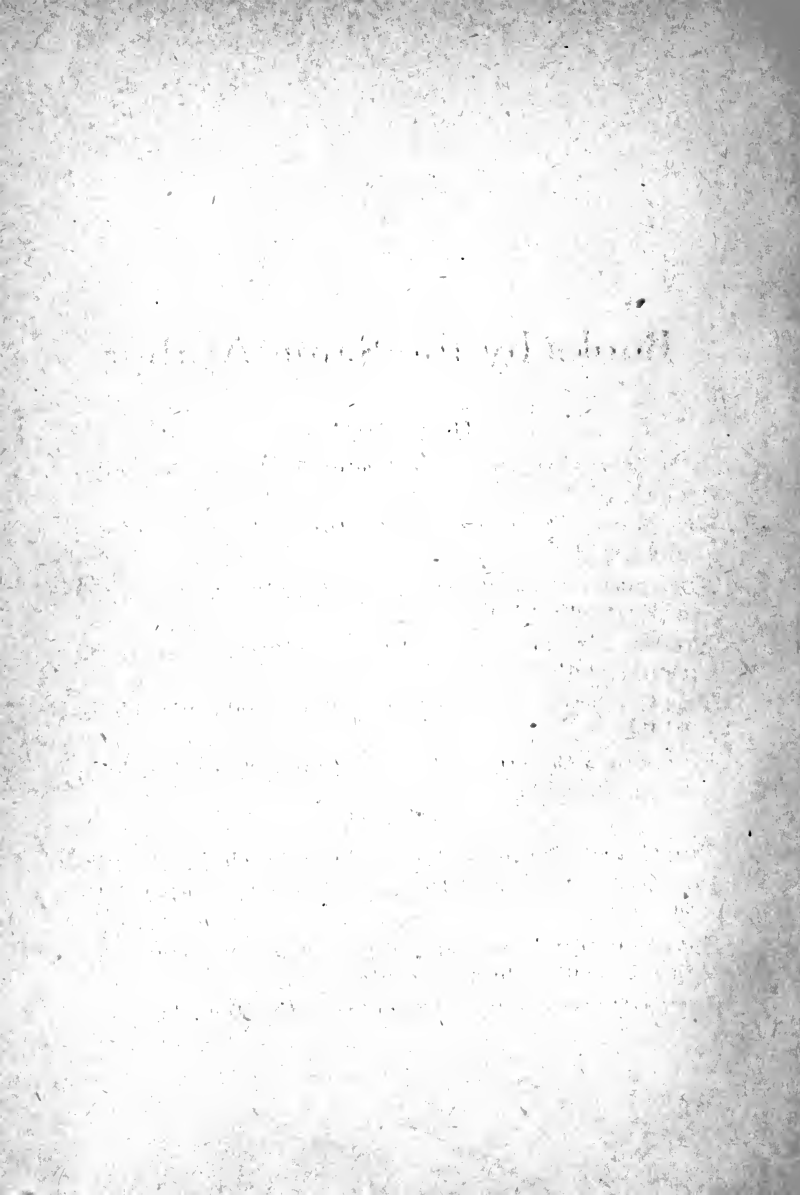
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